

RETREAT FROM
LEARNING

RETREAT FROM LEARNING

*Why Teachers Can't Teach
—A Case History*

BY JOAN DUNN

DAVID McKAY COMPANY, INC.
New York

COPYRIGHT © 1955 BY JOAN DUNN

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or parts thereof, in any form, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

The poem, "Tears," from *The Selected Poems of Lizette Woodworth Reese*, copyright 1916, by Rinehart & Company, Inc., copyright renewed, 1954, by C. Reese Dietrich, is reprinted by permission of Rinehart & Company, Inc.

First Printing, November, 1955
Second Printing, December, 1955

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VAN REES PRESS • NEW YORK

*This book is for my
teachers and my pupils.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WISH to express my gratitude to all those who helped me in the preparation of this book, and my particular thanks to Mr. Hillis Mills and Mr. Michael O'Connell. I am indebted to the Beacon Press for permission to quote from *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, by John Dewey, and to the Estate of John Dewey for permission to quote from *The School and Society*, by John Dewey.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| INTRODUCTION | xi |
| 1. THE REASONS WHY | 3 |
| 2. THE PROFILE OF A HIGH SCHOOL | 20 |
| 3. FROM DAY TO DAY | 85 |
| 4. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS | 142 |
| 5. THE BRASS TACKS | 198 |
| 6. THE LEAVE-TAKING | 210 |

INTRODUCTION

THE MAN before whom I stood stretched out his hands and said, "To be a teacher is a great mission." The man was Pope Pius XII, and I was a teacher. His words brought back into sharp focus the teaching year just past, the ten hectic months that had left me in a state of exhaustion. There was little to remember with pleasure, little to anticipate with enthusiasm. It was August, 1951, and I was in Rome, thousands of miles away from a section in the outer reaches of Greater New York where I had taught English in a public high school for two years and was to continue for two more.

This is the story of what my teaching experience was like.

Education—a "leading out"—is an enterprise that, in New York City, involves more than 200,000 boys and girls of high-school age. They are in school whether or not they want to be there. Most of them do not. They are adolescents, for whom the stable patterns of childhood are breaking up. They are impressionable, volatile, sensitive, and occasionally cruel. Known to commerce as "teen agers," they have magazines and books written for them, clothes designed for them, countless problems ascribed to them. For their specific patronage, certain crooners were booked at the Paramount. Experts of all kinds revolve like satellites around the juvenile world. They tell us how to treat them, feed them, appreciate them, and solve the riddle of their actions.

Parents are told how to understand their children, teachers are taught how to teach their pupils, and the youth industry booms.

The ordinary public-school teacher meets approximately two hundred such neophyte men and women every day. They not only meet, the teacher and the students, but they must also engage in the subtle exchange known as learning—a giving-out and a taking-in. It can be stimulation, excitement, and satisfaction for teacher and class. I have known it to be like that. But more often it is tension, trial, and exhaustion.

Much of the frustration is caused by a philosophy of education that is at once a challenge and a stumbling block. It is a challenge in the goals it sets for the teacher to reach in training his classes. It is a stumbling block in its impracticality and unwieldiness for big-city schools. The city high-school teacher is challenged, as are teachers everywhere, by the children he confronts each day; the city teacher is also defeated by them, for he is overwhelmed by force of numbers, by pressure in the teaching hierarchy from above and below, by his own physical exhaustion. But he is overwhelmed first and foremost by the theory of progressive education, the classroom application of the philosophy of John Dewey. This man who changed the face of education died in 1952 at the age of ninety-three. He was a philosopher, writer, lecturer, and educator. His influence in the field of education was profound and widespread, and it continues to be so after his death. His theories, practices, and reforms must be accepted or rejected by every teacher who comes into contact with them. The teacher encounters progressive education and soon hails or denounces it, for it is too important to be merely tolerated. One must take a stand for or against.

And it is easy to do just that. One may make up one's mind by having experienced the progressive philosophy personally as teacher or student, or one may read all about it. There is scarcely an area in teaching that its exponents have not charted and claimed. John Dewey himself devoted volumes to his views. Here are typical statements:

On the ideal school: "... The school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons."

On the good old days: "But it is useless to bemoan the departure of the good old days of children's modesty, reverence, and implicit obedience, if we expect merely by bemoaning and by exhortation to bring them back. It is radical conditions which have changed, and only an equally radical change in education suffices. . . . The merely intellectual life, the life of scholarship and learning, thus gets a very altered value. 'Academic' and 'scholastic,' instead of being titles of honor, are becoming titles of reproach."

On the new child: "We must recognize our compensations—the increase in toleration, in breadth of social judgment, the large acquaintance with human nature, the sharpened alertness in reading signs of character and interpreting social situations, greater accuracy of adaptation to differing personalities, contact with greater commercial activities."

On discipline: "Of course, order is simply a thing which is relative to an end. . . . [But] out of the occupation, out of doing things that are to produce results, and out of doing these in a social and cooperative way, there is born a discipline of its own kind and type. . . . Our whole conception of school discipline changes when we get this point of view."

On the value of experience: "A lady told me yesterday that she had been visiting different schools trying to find one

where activity on the part of the children preceded the giving of information on the part of the teacher, or where the children had some motive for demanding the education."

On morality: "Morals is not a catalogue of acts nor a set of rules to be applied like drugstore prescriptions or cookbook recipes."

These quotations give us John Dewey's criteria for the best of all possible teaching systems. He maintained that the school should become more of a community center, with the ceaseless activity that that ideal implies. He thought that the silent child was the unduly chastened child and that in modern times, such a condition was both a shame and an anachronism. He dismissed conventional methods of teaching as academic and introduced the idea that unless the working of the everyday world was made the major part of a child's study, his education would be inadequate—with a good chance of being downright harmful. Purely scholastic learning was meaningless and would ultimately do the child more harm than good. He praised the child of the new learning, promising that he would be a saner social being than his older brothers.

Dewey decried discipline for its own sake, substituting in its place a group censure that would originate with the children themselves. The teacher was told to refrain from administering punishments devised and enforced by himself, for they were artificial and without meaning to the child. Again, Dewey valued experience as a guide to learning, in the sense that he believed children should be taught only the things that were certified as true by their previous experience or that their future experience was likely to encompass. For example, only the vocabulary and level of speech likely to be used in the child's social circle should be taught.

In the same way, Dewey proposed that children be coti-

sulted on what was to be taught in a class. They must "feel the need" to know. Learning should never be forced on them. Lastly, he taught that morality, in the sense of a rule to guide men in judging their actions, should never be regarded as dogmatic. Actions were not to be regarded as right or wrong in themselves; circumstances altered cases. This doctrine can be applied in schools today in the following manner: A child is not censured for cheating on an exam because if he did not cheat he would surely fail; the failure would part him from his companions, and it is more important that he remain with his age group than master his studies—or be honest.

We have been considering the basic tenets of progressivism: faith in an experiential and child-centered curriculum, child-administered discipline, and a subjective morality. For a negative comparison, these are also the things that traditionalism (pre-Dewey educational theory) is not. Traditional-minded teachers usually teach from their own curriculum, administer praise and punishment, and believe in the validity of objective truth. At any rate, they teach as if they do.

Progressive education is in force in any private school where the regents, trustees, and faculty of the school believe in it. It is introduced in any public-school system where the board of education believes in it. Naturally, the ordinary teacher in a large public-school system has little to say in the matter; he is simply told what to do. Though progressive education is practiced in varying degrees throughout the nation, it is concentrated in the larger cities. It affects elementary and secondary education to a great degree; it is followed with less devotion on the collegiate level.

I am familiar with New York City public education on the high-school level, and while I am not qualified to speak

of other systems in other cities, I feel that there must be many teachers elsewhere who have shared my experience. Let me tell you about my life as a teacher and about my job, the job that the public believes is an easy one.

The job is not easy. To become a teacher today in New York City is to commit yourself to a ten-month merry-go-round that starts whirling the Monday after Labor Day and does not stop until the last day in June, when, amid great shouts and clashing cymbals, you stagger off, your head still spinning and your legs weak under you. I got off the merry-go-round for good one June, but beneath the hurdy-gurdy music you may catch a sadder strain. Youthful songs are always bittersweet.

My reasons for leaving were, I think, serious ones. If you are interested in teachers, schools, and school children, you may want to know why I voluntarily left a profession that I loved.

**RETREAT FROM
LEARNING**

1. THE REASONS WHY

"WHAT DO *you* do?"

"I teach school."

"Kindergarten?"

"No. High school."

"Health Ed.?"

"Wrong again. English."

"Really? Say, that's interesting." Pause. "How did *you* ever get to be a teacher?"

At parties and on trains, planes, and ships, while crossing channels, mountains, and countries, casually or seriously, people talk. Sooner or later, the conversation might narrow to ways of making a living—yours, for instance. When I told people that I was a teacher, they were usually interested, usually surprised. Everyone who has been to school has something to say about it, some story to tell about teachers or friends, and it is a subject that permits a wide range of attitudes. People are serious about schooling, or they are derisive, or reflective, or confidently anecdotal. Or very funny. For there is in the enterprise of teaching a rich vein of laughter that is its support and safety valve—ask any teacher, or any pupil.

Sometimes, when I listened to myself in the classroom, explaining, instructing, arguing, pacifying, I asked myself

the same questions that others had asked me: "What are you doing in front of a class? What made you choose teaching?" While my self-questioning was in part rhetorical, it was nevertheless in order. I had got there, I would remind myself, through a progression of events that pointed to a teaching career by the time I was a college senior. The only thought I ever gave the matter in precollege days was voiced in the often repeated statement that I would *never* be a teacher—the sort of thing one says about what one would most like to do. As it happened, the "never" was dropped from my life, and I spent four years doing exactly what I claimed I would oever do. But it did not happen overnight; it came about gradually, chiefly as a result of the contacts I had with young people. These contacts began during my own childhood and continued into my college years, and they all helped to put me in front of a high-school classroom.

But the first time I ever thought of teaching in terms of my working future was at the beginning of my junior year in college. I had to decide what major and minor courses I wanted to follow for the next two years, and, as an English major, either of two minor fields of study, journalism or education, was open to me. The class adviser asked me which one it was to be, and I could not say; both were equally attractive. The idea of "journalism" fascinated me—suggesting as it did Boswell, Ben Hecht, and typewriter bells. But, I reasoned, there was a lot to be said for teaching, too, especially teaching English and English literature. How wonderful it would be to talk about something you liked so much! Already looking upon myself as a devoted mentor of literary youth (my future students were all to be as interested in literature as I was at that moment), but still hearing the siren song of muted presses, I could not make up my mind.

"Why not minor in both until you decide," suggested my adviser.

"Why not, indeed?" I thought.

The following Monday I began my overloaded and divided schedule: English classes, journalism classes, and education classes. The trouble was that I liked them all. It quickly became apparent, however, that this state of irresolution must be resolved—and soon. I could not do the work required for all my classes and my professors were not impressed by my attitude of wait and see. So by the following Monday, I had enrolled myself in the ranks of the prospective teachers, while most of my friends allied themselves with the school newspaper-magazine-yearbook crowd. For I had decided to study education after all, and though I had really known I would before, the immediate cause of my decision was the teacher of the education courses—a woman of profound convictions and great talent. She was herself such an outstanding teacher that I think she charmed me into wanting to be like her. In any case, to teach as well as she did became my ambition. When she described the exhilaration of teaching, when she numbered the expressions to be seen on the faces of the young, when she told us of the good we could do—in short, when she herself was so sound and so admirable, I caught by contagion some measure of her enthusiasm and wanted to learn to do as she did.

But there were other reasons as well—minor ones, like the idea of a summer vacation (I had not had a proper one since my high-school days) and what I naïvely thought was a short working day, and major ones, like the idea of being a professional teacher and associating with other teachers. The word "faculty" began to impress me just as much as "journalism." "Faculty" connoted mortarboards and meetings—serious discussions about recalcitrant students (in my

fantasies I was always the one who knew just what to do), heartfelt chats with slow but eager scholars, and quietly witty conversations with my colleagues. And over it all, in my dreams, bells chimed, calling all to fruitful study. But my primary, deep-seated reason for wanting to teach was that I liked children and wanted to work with them. They never yet had bored or bothered me; I enjoyed the ones I had already known—the funny, priceless, unpredictable kids.

My first experience in supervising children was that of any girl who has a younger brother or sister. I have a younger brother, and for six years, while we attended the same school and had the same teachers, he two years behind me, I was responsible for him during school hours. I was a good little girl, polite, and academically diligent, but my brother was a "bad" little boy. He was the scrappy, hot-headed kind, quick to fight, and staggering under the load of a burgeoning temper. It was doubly hard for him to be exemplary, for when he did something wrong he was usually asked by his teachers, in tones of mock disbelief, "Are you *really* Joan's brother?" Whereupon he usually struck out his underlip and set up the wailing that marked my entrance—for at the first sign of trouble, I would be sent for, fetched, and delivered by one of those smug monitors whose appearance at *my* classroom door could mean only one thing. The performance was usually short, and invariably ended with my being charged to make my brother's faults known to my mother. I would exit sadly but proudly as the tear-stained and hiccuping boy made his way up the long aisle to his seat.

On one occasion, however, we deviated somewhat from the pattern. I was summoned to my brother's room to find him standing stiffly by his seat. The teacher, known as "a terror," was also standing. I knew she was angry because

she did not indulge in the usual preliminary mock-astonished banter. Upon my entrance she fixed a steady eye upon my brother and spoke tersely.

"Make the noise for your sister that you did a few minutes ago."

In the short, charged silence that followed, I could see my brother's face getting red. His eyes were lowered. Suddenly, he let out an extended Bronx cheer. It was so well done that my admiration took the form I knew he preferred: I laughed out loud. Anger and astonishment struggled for mastery on the teacher's face as she looked from me to him, and we returned her scrutiny, both grinning foolishly. I was abruptly dismissed.

My little brother taught me, though I was scarcely older than he, that the care of a child is not so much a burden as it is a joy in mutual experience. I was to find this experience again when I became a teacher.

When I was about eleven, I did baby-sitting, as did most girls of my age. This taught me that working with a group of children, in contrast to being in charge of one particular child, was also worth while, carrying, in as many ways as there were individual children, its own special rewards. I learned that if one was nice to them, if one gave them a reasonable amount of undivided attention, one eventually made an impression on their consciousness as someone to be remembered. It was nice to see the comradely wave of a young hand and realize that it was for you; it was even nicer to be the audience for their wonderfully original stories and to learn about their imaginary companions who were always the culprits when matches were lit or cookies taken from the kitchen. I learned to relish their candid appraisals of people and things, based, no doubt, on their constant questionings. I found that when an older person takes time and

bothers with children, he will find it worth something to the child as well as to himself. But, like every other situation in which one is involved with people instead of with things, it may take a long time before the good results are evident. The accountant who takes a lively delight in seeing the figures work out, the machinist who fixes the motor, and the singer who masters the song, all enjoy fairly speedy and obvious results. Not so with people; especially not so with children. For here are two, working together, with infinite permutations and combinations of personality and situation, and the results, if any, are a long time coming—but how rewarding when they do, even though success in handling children depends nearly as much on their willingness to be won as on your skill in winning.

Working with young children, I found, was infinitely worth while because of their unformed humanity and their overwhelming sincerity. They lie abominably but with wide eyes and huge enjoyment; they battle often but seldom hold resentments; they cry a lot, but their sorrows are as transitory as they are sharp. Working with children gives adults a sense of clearer purpose than could possibly be achieved by working with contemporaries; it makes them feel stable, secure, looked-up-to; they guide and they guide well, for others depend upon them.

It never changed, my feeling of being stimulated and rewarded by working with youth—the very young who were my first responsibilities and the adolescents whom I later taught. Even then I knew they could be charming, exhausting, terrifying, clever, or slow, but I also knew that they were never boring. I sensed that teaching could never be a monotonous job. I knew that young children are always popping up with odd and revealing questions, or painfully true evaluations, and I knew that they could be fun. As they

get older, I later found, they become a challenge because the older the child is, the more he values his privacy. The young child tells all, the adolescent hides his sorrows, and the adult is a veritable encyclopedia of secret feelings—joys, sorrows, and humiliations. And the more interesting the mature child becomes, the more troublesome he is, and the more skill is needed on the part of parent or teacher to draw out what should be drawn out and leave untouched what should be untouched. Children are stimulating because they are human beings, with that ennobling and elusive X-factor that convinces those who work with them of the impossibility of predicting another human being's thoughts, words, or actions. One can say that one and one make two, but one can never predict with absolute certainty that George will meet you at six under the clock at the Biltmore. The same uncertainty that ensures stimulation, that makes working with people so infinitely varied an experience, carries with it a frightening responsibility. You can get mad at an addressograph machine, knowing that it is a vain emotion, but knowing also that if sufficiently provoked, you can smash it with a hammer and satisfactorily vent your anger. That is something you may not do to a child. The machine will never cry out in pain, but neither will it smile at you, like you, or trust you. Somehow, I knew I liked youngsters, liked their vitality, their humor—even their frank selfishness—and liked their astoundingly truthful answers to disinterested adult questions.

So when the time came to choose, remembering all these things, I decided to become a teacher.

My first serious contact with young people after my decision came in the form of a summer job. As most business concerns and personnel directors can testify, the summer season is notorious for the number of high-school and col-

lege students eager to obtain temporary employment. The students swamp waiting rooms, pester friends and relatives already working, and waste the time of employment agencies. They cheerfully falsify their ages and swear—straight-faced—that they want permanent jobs. Everyone knows their statements are blatantly false, but it is a passably enjoyable game. It is useful, too, for it introduces the student to the workings of the business world and gives him some knowledge of what a job entails; it is a good way to help him decide what to do after graduation.

And so it was with me. I had been temporarily employed in offices and stores during previous summers and had decided, at the end of my junior year in college, that I wanted to do something different during the coming vacation. My college had a placement service, and from April or May to the end of the term, there were always crowds around the bulletin board, squinting at the fine print. There was one job opportunity that caused much loud mirth: an agency was in the market for someone to teach on an Indian reservation in Arizona. In addition to the ordinary pedagogical requirements the applicant had to be able to "ride a horse over difficult terrain through extremes of weather." Had I known what I myself was going to do that summer, I might not have laughed.

I secured a position as a kind of teacher's helper for a group of young children in a play school on Manhattan's lower East Side. A play school is a place where working mothers leave their offspring for the day; it is run along the lines of a regular school except that the children are not so much taught subjects as they are diverted. For example, groups were taken to the park where they gardened a little plot of land, or to the nearest public library where they were read to, or they were sent to the gym to play ball.

Occasionally, they were taken (by a regularly licensed public-school teacher in charge and myself in assistance) on longer, more ambitious expeditions. Once a week, on Mondays, we were packed into several busses and carried along teeming bridges and highways to Long Beach, where a group of young people received us, children and supervisors, as their guests for the day. Twice during the summer, we escorted the entire group of thirty or so on special outings: once to the Bronx Zoo and once—a memorable, nerve-shattering experience—to the Statue of Liberty.

We set off on a steaming August morning. Around us welled the busy day sounds—the opening of stores, the sweeping of streets, the collection of garbage, the raucous admonitions from upstairs windows to the scampering children below. We were thirty children and two adults, carrying lunches in brown paper bags, marching in double file along the crowded streets, and already beginning to feel, at nine o'clock in the morning, the first stabs of the sun. We descended from street to subway, where my fellow teacher and I shepherded the wriggling kids through the turnstiles, and then did our best to keep them from falling off the platform while they peeped up-tunnel for the train. We later ascended from subway to street, were momentarily revived by whiffs of salt air rushing over the Battery, and embarked for Bedloes Island. The trip was unforgettable. The children swarmed from the refreshment stand to the deck railing (which they considered a temporary barrier between them and the bay), and darted from one end of the boat to the other. When we finally gained the island, the statue loomed frighteningly large. I was overwhelmed by the size of it; the children, of course, were not. During the short rest period that followed our arrival, I convinced myself of my inability to attain the crown:

the base alone, where I knew from previous experience the elevator ended, seemed miles high. The children, however, their batteries recharged by popcorn and the novelty of it all, surged forward. I followed unwillingly.

The temperature was about ninety-five degrees, the forward movement relentless. We boarded the elevator and were soon ejected on a foreboding stone platform inside the statue. I knew this was the top of the pedestal. From here it was foot power alone that would carry us to the dizzy heights. Desperately, I seized one of our charges and asked him if he thought he could make it to the top.

"Ahhh. What?"

"Alvin, are you sure you want to climb all the way to the top? I mean, you don't feel sick or anything?"

"Na. I wanna go with the class."

"You're sure now? Once you start up, you can't come down again."

"Yeah, I'm sure."

He, certain, and I, haggard with anticipation, joined the others. The inside of the Statue of Liberty resembles an upended tunnel, echoing with voices and hung from top to bottom with canvases. We started to climb upward on a narrow spiral staircase. It was stifling inside the statue, and as we slowly mounted, signs of distress began to appear. Our leader, a young elementary-school teacher, led the group, and I ended it, and while it was the best way to protect the children, it also had its disadvantages. For one thing, any message from her to me would have to be relayed through the entire group. After receiving countless contradictory commands and questionable suggestions, I gave up and just smiled weakly when Alvin, immediately in front of me, turned and whispered, round-eyed, "Miss Marcus says, 'Jump!'"

And taking a good look at Alvin confirmed my worst suspicions. He was sick, but luckily he did not know it yet. I had seen him perform on our weekly bus trips, and his color was now the green shade that I had learned to associate with the Williamsburg Bridge on a hot July morning.

"Are you sick, Alvin?"

"Ha?"

"Do you feel all right?"

"Sure. Why?"

"Nothing. Never mind."

His reflective look made me sorry I had brought the whole thing up. Relentlessly, we inched upward. Whimpers were heard.

"I'm sick."

"Whenna we gawn home?"

"I wanna drinka water."

"It's hot."

Just when I was beginning to think that the summit of the crown was outside our reach forever, we took a final tortuous upward turn and entered a small room banded with windows. It was a relief to be there even though the height was unnerving; the ships in the harbor looked like toys in a baby's bath. I felt the relief of knowing that something awful is half over—that and the reluctance to finish, as when a tooth is half drilled or a painful explanation half made. For we had come to this point, had gained the crown, but we now had to get down again. Even the nerveless kids were fazed by Miss Liberty; they contented themselves with a cautious glance out the window and a mass push in the direction of the downward spiral.

We went home in a state of collective exhaustion; the children could only muster enough bounce for some fitful pummeling on the subway. We delivered them, limp, rest-

less, and dog-tired, at the school. Later that evening, going uptown on the bus, I brooded. Statue of Liberty, eh? What good did it do? I stared out the window. Here I am exhausted, upset, and unfit for human company. And, slowly, surprisingly, in spite of the heat, the discomfort, and my stiff muscles, came the answer: it was the first time the children had seen it and maybe the last; you should be at least a little glad you took them. Too bad that you did not want to climb to the top. The words cut into the base refer to you and the kids; the girls with their flopping hair bows and their clean, pressed dresses, and the boys with their shirts that have baseball bats printed all over them are the "tempest-tossed" for whom was lifted the "lamp beside the golden door." I smiled; memory was already smoothing the edges. Alvin suddenly became appealingly right in his firm resolve to climb to the top, and the joke was on me. Working with youngsters was worth while. This was a lesson that strengthened my resolve to teach.

I returned to college in September to start my final year. It was during this year that I had my first formal contact with children of the age group that I was later to teach, and this came about through a feature of the course known as practice teaching, the most useful of all educational preparatory courses. It was required by the Board of Education of all prospective teachers, and under the program the college student went to a public high school, spending three hours a day for six months assigned to a regular teacher. You sat at the back of her classroom, watched and listened while she taught, corrected papers for her and nearly everyone else in the department, and kept your eyes and ears open. It was a real apprenticeship and supplied a wholesome dash of reality to students who had learned only pedagogical theory in the past year and a half. My apprenticeship was served

in an all-girl school, a feature both good and bad. It was good because my first head-on encounter with an actual schoolroom situation was a pleasant one—just how pleasant I was not to realize until later. It was bad because it did little to prepare me for what was to come.

One worked hard as a practice teacher. I went to the high school every morning for three hours, from nine to twelve, and then returned to the college for my own classes, which frequently were in session until five in the evening. Nor was the role of practice teacher an entirely passive one. I had to teach a minimum of three times during this period. I taught the class that I observed regularly; I was familiar with what the children were learning, knew them, and—what was even more important—they knew me. The teacher under whom I was studying had introduced me to them at the beginning of the term so that at least I was not a stranger when I faced them for the first time—nervous, ill at ease, unsure of myself. When a student teacher was herself observed, it was by her college professor, and occasionally by the teacher whose class she had taken over. This was a very important day for a young teacher, comparable to an opening night for an actress. She was judged, as she would always be judged as long as she remained a teacher, on many points: her manner and manners, her voice, her speech, her sense of humor, her sense of decorum, her strength of will, her morals, her knowledge, her skills, her talents—herself, in short. Added to the self-consciousness engendered by this trial is the awareness that you are the center of attraction; it may be that this is the first time in your life that so many people are watching you. Before you, placed as inconspicuously as possible on the desk, is your lesson plan, the skeleton structure of the lesson that you have outlined, polished, and sweated over for many hours. I remember feeling as if

a good many years of my life had gone into that single sheet of typed paper, and I longed to clutch it in my hands, as a sort of anchor to reality. It was hard to keep my eyes from it and even harder to keep them on the class. *Their* eyes blinded me.

My first lesson was, naturally, an elaborately ambitious one on poetry, which entailed my reading aloud and having the class answer questions. The girls were very nice and very confused. Most of my questions fell quite flat, and what had sounded so right to my ears when I read and reread it to myself in the college residence, sounded silly asked out loud in the high-school classroom. One girl, a bright and sensitive student, made a few valiant attempts to salvage the lesson and nearly succeeded. The real difficulty was that I had not the slightest idea how to talk to students of high-school age. My first lesson was made to sound like a discussion of poetry by young university intellectuals. I was nervous and awkward, without the good sense to scrap what I had planned, and improvise. Improvise! I hoped that the floor would cave in. When my professor and I held a hurried conference in the back of the room, she got to the point quickly.

"You recite poetry worse than the students. No wonder they didn't know what you were talking about. Remind me to put you in the interpretive reading course next term."

And with her guidance, the sympathetic help of the teacher in charge of me, and my own efforts, I managed to do better the next time.

Practice teaching was good experience and the best of all possible ways to prepare a young person for a classroom career. I did not stay in the same classroom to observe all the time; each student was assigned to a single teacher, but we also moved around to others, to those who taught special

classes of intellectually graded students, for example, and, all in all, we got a comprehensive view of the department in which we were interested—at least as that department was conducted in the school to which we were assigned. The girls' school in which I did my practice teaching was a good one, well-staffed and efficiently run—for my purposes too much so, perhaps, for it did nothing to prepare me for the shattering experience of coming up against high-school boys for the first time. I think now, in retrospect, that it made my first term as a teacher even worse than it might have otherwise been. It would have been easier for me to have met the male adolescent first while still a student teacher, and not as a teacher assigned for the whole term. They needed quite a bit of getting used to, and it is hard for the inexperienced to assume responsibility for the boys' behavior and instruction at the very same time.

After six months of practice teaching, I was not sure that I would actually start teaching the following September, but the idea was becoming increasingly attractive. There was always the difficulty of getting a job, but that problem was not a pressing one in the middle of my senior year in college. I had my college courses to keep me occupied and my thesis to complete. Therefore, most of my self-questionings concerned the personal aspects of teaching. How would I *really* be as a teacher? I began to consider myself in this role and to dramatize what I would say in certain situations and how I would say it. I began to think back over the practice-teaching term just finished and consider how I would have handled various disciplinary problems had I had the authority to do so. I considered methods of directing certain lessons; I mulled over ways to teach Shakespeare and thought how enjoyable it would be to read and correct the creative writing that my students would always

be doing. I thought about what I would wear and how to have my hair cut, for I was told that I looked too young to command respect. This knotty problem haunted my academic fancies quite a bit. How could I be dignified without being dowdy? But then, "Don't be silly," said I, and thought about something else instead. I would not have dismissed my vague worries on this score so soon had I realized what a substantial problem this is for a teacher—presenting an effective appearance. Nevertheless, in my mind it soon became quite easy to see myself suitably arrayed in front of a classroom, chatting easily to a relaxed and interested group. The fall clothes I thought about during the summer I was graduated from college were clothes that could be worn while teaching; I even began to wonder if I, accustomed to flats, could stand all day in high-heeled shoes. But out of all these enjoyable posings-in-prospect came two considered decisions: the first was that I wanted to be a teacher and the other was that I wanted to teach in a high school.

I wanted to teach because it seemed natural for me to be around young people. Also, I had majored in English in college and loved it. It therefore seemed right for me to choose a job that enabled me to use my tastes as well as my education in an immediate, direct way. My college training had given me the means of making a living as an English teacher; it had taught me the literature of my language and some of the literature of other languages, and it had also taught me a lot about how to teach what I knew to others. I looked back with a complete lack of interest upon the summer jobs I had had in various offices around New York. It gradually became inconceivable to me to work in one again. So, I thought, why not be a teacher? It seemed to me then, as it seems to me now, that it was a more worthwhile job than any other. I looked forward to it with en-

thusiasm and interest—tinged with doubt that I would measure up.

My second decision, to teach high school, was a direct outgrowth of my English studies. So much of the teaching of literature and its attendant skills has to be done orally, and sometimes even in an offhand manner, that I thought it needed an older mind to retain it. It seemed to me, moreover, that my temperament was suited to the older child; I could picture myself being infinitely more patient with the child who did not understand a poem than with the child who needed to have his rubbers put on. As I grew older, the older child had become more interesting to me, and from my own recent experience, I thought I could sympathize with him in his trials and tribulations. My practice teaching had confirmed these ideas.

Accordingly, I took the New York City substitute teacher's exam in March of my senior year in college. The day on which I was graduated from college, the mother of a friend told me that there was a vacancy in her school for the fall term. She proposed that I apply; I did, and was hired. The Board of Education notified me in August that I had passed the examination. At about 8:15 A.M. on the Friday before the Monday after Labor Day, I walked along the cracked pavements and rounded, for the first of many times, the corner under the big shade trees and came within view of the school.

The term was beginning again, and there was excitement in the air, that particular sharp-pencil, clean-copybook, brand-new-eraser crackle in the ether that made me walk a little faster. The term was beginning, and I was a teacher.

2. THE PROFILE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

The School

WHAT I expected teaching to be and what I found it to be were very different things. I had imagined a school world like the one that I had known myself, a world of long hours of study, a world in which I had been a child. I thought that my future students would be interested in nearly the same things I was interested in. But it was not that way at all. I thought they would be children, too, but they were not. I expected them to want to learn, but they did not. Let me show you what I mean by describing my school, the system that employed me, my fellow teachers, and my students.

This was my high school. The neighborhood was bad—economically, physically, visually. The school was a great orange square of a building that looked like a factory. Around it were four strips of pavement, and beyond them were vacant lots, unpaved streets, and low buildings. Running along one side was an elevated subway, and off in the distance could be seen the fantastic shapes of the rides of Coney Island, towers, wheels, and arching chutes. On the other side, the Narrows led to the sea. Directly opposite the school was the ugliest lot imaginable, heaped with refuse

and assorted bric-a-brac that included, on one memorable winter's morning, a privy. The street along here had once been paved, but now the neglected earth heaving under it made walking a curious up-and-down progression.

You entered the building by mounting a flight of stone steps. The school was laid out symmetrically, with a fair-sized courtyard in the center, an auditorium on the first floor, two inside gyms and an outside one, two cafeterias (one for students, one for teachers) in the basement, about 85 classrooms, and one elevator for the use of teachers and physically incapacitated students. The school was equipped to handle about 4,000 students, and enrollment was usually at capacity. The building was only about ten years old; that meant that the equipment was still in fairly good condition, even though classes were crowded and the student chairs carved and carved again by rank on rank of inattentive scholars.

The building was four stories high, and your first impression, upon entering, was an awareness of subdued energy, of immanent noise, as if a giant dynamo were humming somewhere in the cellar. Most of the first floor was given over to offices, with a few classrooms, one of them a shop class and another a science lecture room. The other floors were all classrooms and gyms. We had a faculty of about 160 and a staff of nonteaching personnel of perhaps 15 or 20. All teachers were required to punch a time card, and this official record of your physical presence was, I believe, taken quite seriously. The school day lasted six hours and fifteen minutes—8:25 to 2:40. Extracurricular activities—coaching teams, conducting band or play rehearsals, acting as moderator for clubs—began after 2:40, and if an activity happened to be popular enough, it might go on until five o'clock or later. The teachers who did this work,

sometimes as volunteers, sometimes under coercion, were not paid for it; the only exceptions were the athletics coaches. English and speech teachers, for example, were not compensated for such difficult time-consuming tasks as preparing the school play or editing student publications. You were, however, supposed to receive some consideration in your program—a few good classes perhaps—as a reward. You did not always get it.

If, therefore, you were an ordinary teacher having a full program, with no classes dropped for grade advising, counseling, chairmanship, or the like, your day would run something like this: You would have an official or "prefect" class, five teaching periods, one period for lunch, one non-teaching assignment, and one free period—eight periods in all in addition to your official class.

One thing was certain. You would soon learn to be an early riser. Taking one hour for travel as the average, you would have to get up at 6:30. It was necessary to be on time, for if you were late, someone else would have to cover your class, and that would mean a bad start for the day. So, disheartened, perhaps by the sight of the lot across the street, you arrived at school on time, punched your time card, went to your classroom, locked up your coat, and took your place.

Your official class would be moving in, and during the fifteen minutes allotted to you, you had to: take and record the attendance, have the children salute the flag and sing one stanza of "America," read any and all notices that were sent to you for the class's attention, hand out leaflets and questionnaires ("Are there any defective electrical sockets in *your* home? Check Yes or No."), dispatch students to the deans, keep your own students in the classroom and other students out. Just to compound the disorder, the public-

address system would keep up a lively monologue. Then the bell would ring, releasing the official class, and in a few minutes the next class would troop in. That is, if you were quite lucky and had a classroom of your own. At least once every two or three terms, you would have to "float"—have classes in more than one room, sometimes as many as four different rooms for five classes. This meant picking up your books and papers as one class ended and making your way to another room, a process that bore many resemblances to musical chairs. So, you teach your five classes, any combination of terms and types, and you carry out your building assignment, and that could easily be a real chore. For example, the Study Hall, the Cafeteria, or the Detention Rooms (where students were "punished" by having to spend a period after their school day in "silence") were difficult assignments because of the large number of children involved. There were, of course, a certain number of comparatively easy assignments, such as hall patrol (keeping the corridors free of unauthorized people), but these were pre-empted in accordance with seniority or patronage. If you were a young teacher just starting out, you could reasonably expect to get the most unruly classes, an overcrowded prefect, and a disagreeable building assignment. In addition, you were most frequently called upon during your free period to cover other teachers' classes.

Your impression of the school, however, and of teaching in general, depended to a great extent on your chairman. It was he who gave you your program and whose sympathy or ill favor set the tenor of your professional life. I was extremely fortunate in working for a woman who helped me, who treated me from the first with kindness and understanding. Had I stumbled upon someone who doubted my teaching ability or for one reason or another just did

not like me, my career as a teacher could have been a joyless experience, for it is impossible to maintain your equilibrium when you meet hostility on all sides. As it is, you get little respect from the students, and when you have to battle with your supervisor, too, teaching becomes more difficult than any job has a right to be.

However, even under good conditions the kind of teaching day common in New York City schools leaves you physically and emotionally exhausted. There never seems to be time for oneself; even your lunch must be hastily eaten in approximately twenty minutes in the basement cafeteria (it takes the balance of the forty-minute period just to get downstairs and put your sandwich on the table) and you are not allowed to leave the building before 2:40 P.M. One always seems to be hurrying—straining to be on time in the morning, rushing from one classroom to another, trying to correct two hundred papers during your free period so you won't have to take them home, pulling out in the afternoon, still in hot haste, so that you can spend a few hours in privately enjoyable ways before you must correct papers or plan future lessons. Any housework to be done reduces you to a state of fatigue that is beyond the repair of one night's sleep. It was my experience that you had to be in bed by ten thirty or eleven at the latest, and therefore it was unthinkable to go out at night during the week. A double feature at the local Bijou was enough to throw you out of balance all next day. In that one small but significant respect, your private life was not your own. Still, you were expected to belong to all sorts of organizations and attend their stimulating meetings, keep abreast of all movements, political and cultural, see all the new plays and movies, read all the latest books and watch all the television programs. In the meantime you planned fas-

cinating lessons for your classes, corrected countless papers, kept in good physical and mental shape, were available at all times for interviews with students, deans, and parents, acted as moderator of an extracurricular activity, led an active social life, traveled all over the world, and went to graduate school at night for an M.A. in education.

That sketches a day, a day that requires twice the allotted number of hours, and a day that can be multiplied into a way of life. It also demanded nerves of steel, for worst of all is the tension attached to teaching under the circumstances common in today's New York public schools. It is a watchful, anxious awareness of the possibility that anything can happen at any time. This is over and above any uneasiness you may feel, standing in front of a bored and hostile class, or any nervousness connected with an ambitious lesson planned for a good class. This tautness of your nerves, this consciousness that your attention is divided among a half-dozen considerations when it should be concentrated on the matter at hand—namely, teaching the class in front of you—is the result of two strong and steady pressures. The one exerted by the children is obvious and immediate, taking any one of the numerous forms devised by them to advertise their disinterest or disfavor. It could be anything from a mass falling asleep to the stamping of feet, loudly and in unison. The knowledge that something of the sort can happen is always present, and you must be prepared for the contingency. And the other pressure, from your supervisors, is usually more remote but just as unremitting. There is the chance, for example, that you may be "observed" without warning; your chairman, or the principal, or some visiting dignitary might come and sit at the back of your class while you teach. You are not always notified of this observation in advance, and should you

have a cold or a headache or feel unusually tired, no allowance is made for you. Teachers are expected to be in top form at all times and under all conditions.

This tension is an occupational hazard whose results are very noticeable at certain times of the year, especially before holidays and during the entire month of June; a friend and I spent a few lunch hours cataloguing our colleagues' nervous habits, and we even found some for ourselves. Certainly there were teachers who seemed to breeze through their days completely unruffled and were always the first to leave in the afternoon. I suspect that they were not really teaching. They did not have the worked-over look of the teacher who tries to do everything required of him.

As I have said, in its physical aspects, our school was much better than many others. It was as well cared for as was possible, considering the number of students. The rooms were cleaned every day, although the blackboards were not. Many of us tried to clean up during the day by having the wastebasket passed around to collect paper that had been strewn on the floor. But if you had to change classes every period, it was another story. You might have ideas about keeping a classroom clean, but someone who shared your room might not believe that a neat classroom has any effect on students. (They are, I learned, particularly responsive to such seeming trifles. And I concluded that outward order encourages inward order.) Accordingly, we tried to keep the room as pleasant as possible, hanging pictures on the walls, pulling hard wads of gum from the seats, rubbing chalk marks off the desks. I even kept plants on the window sill one spring term, but it turned out to be more trouble than it was worth. A boy had volunteered to water them for me, and when, at the end of the term, one

bloomed, he wanted written commendation for "teacher's help."

A word must be said here about the departmental organization of a large public high school. In order to handle and give a reasonable education to its many thousands of students, the school has separate departments functioning under a single administrative unit. Accordingly, there is a department for nearly every subject taught—an English department, a history department, a math department, and so on. Every department is headed by a chairman, and the teachers—anywhere from two to twenty-five depending on the number of classes the department must teach—work under his direct supervision. The chairman, who has a list of the classes that must be taught in his subject for the coming term, assigns these classes to his teachers, usually five to a teacher. The nonteaching, or building, assignment is assigned by the assistant principal. No teacher may teach more than five classes a day, although he may teach less. Student counselors, grade advisers, deans, are relieved of two, three, and sometimes four classes so that they can perform their other duties. Chairmen usually teach one or two periods a day, and generally they teach the better classes. The rest of their time is taken up with the administration of their departments.

Teachers in all departments are either regularly appointed or substitute teachers. Anyone may become a substitute by taking the required education courses (terms of study during which the college student is taught how to teach). The content of these courses is prescribed by the New York City Board of Education, and they must be taken by anyone who wants to become a teacher. They constitute roughly the same number of credits needed to make a particular field of study one's minor field of study—about 20 credits.

Accordingly, one is eligible to take the city substitute exam when one has completed such courses as the History and Philosophy of Education, Educational Psychology, General Methods of Teaching, and Special Methods of Teaching English, History, French, or whatever it is you want to teach; one must also complete six months of practice teaching in order to qualify. Most of the courses are explained by their titles. Educational Psychology examines the young human being as a student and as a statistic; the History of Education and its Philosophy are just that—a recital and appraisal of every significant previous educational system. General Methods attempted to give a comprehensive program for transferring knowledge, and Special Methods simply narrowed the program down to ways of transferring the particular knowledge you planned to teach. The ways and means, the ins and outs, the tricks and the techniques were embodied in the methods courses. This was the immediate (and most useful) preparation for the one really valuable course of study—practice teaching. The entire education course could be completed in the last two years of college.

When the city schedules an examination in your license area, therefore, you can take it if you have successfully completed the course requirements. Should you pass it, you will be given a license, but it will be on a substitute basis. You are not eligible to take the examination—a different one entirely—for the regular license until you have completed graduate work in education to the extent of validation for a master's degree. The substitute exam, then, tests you in the subject you intend to teach and not in any of the education courses you have had to take. If you pass the test, you are considered to be qualified to teach, on condition that you pass an oral and a physical examination.

You are then thrown on your own and must find a position by journeying from one school to another. If you are lucky, you find a vacancy in your own subject and may be hired for the term.

The new substitute teachers in any department are usually given the worst classes for the simple reason that those teachers in the department who have seniority consider themselves entitled to a better program. Ultimately, the fate of a new teacher, in terms of the classes he is given, depends on the sense of justice of the head of department. But it is generally accepted that the new teachers need not be considered in assigning classes, and few complaints are made because a substitute's job depends on his chairman; it is the latter who does the hiring and firing, and it is not politic to antagonize him.

However, it does not always happen that all the young men and women licensed to teach secure positions, in spite of the great fuss that has been made in recent years about the serious teacher shortage. Such a dearth of qualified teachers may exist in other states or in rural areas, but it does not exist in New York City. New York has too many teachers, particularly on the high-school level. This unbalanced state of affairs is due to a number of factors, the most obvious one being the average age of high-school teachers—most of whom are middle-aged or older; few are in their twenties. In effect, this means that there is not a rapid enough turnover to give the younger teacher a reasonable chance of appointment and advancement. The factors governing this serious situation are these: Regularly appointed teachers must teach thirty-five years before they can retire; many women continue to teach after marriage when it is not financially necessary for them to do so; and finally, the practice of licensing substitutes enables the

school system to draw upon a large body of qualified teachers at need—all of whom may be asked to assume regular teaching programs, and even to moderate extra-curricular activities, while receiving less pay than regularly appointed teachers and enjoying no tenure whatsoever. The sub is hired when he is needed and promptly fired when he is not.

Substitute jobs are easier to find in September than in January, when the school enrollment is more stabilized. Because yearly graduation in the elementary schools has replaced the previous custom of twice-yearly graduation, there are few incoming students in the spring term, and the size of the faculty shrinks in direct ratio to the number of students. What subs are supposed to do for a living when they are fired in January and told that they will probably be needed again in September is a mystery. The Board of Education also puts off to the last minute notifying principals and chairmen just how many vacancies there will be for a particular term—supposedly because the number of teachers retiring, resigning, or going on sabbatical must be ascertained. It would seem, rather, that this comes about because the board knows that there are sure to be many more subs than there are positions in the high schools, and candidates for the few vacancies available need not be treated with any finesse.

Being hired as a substitute teacher for six months, an entire term, is considered an excellent stroke of luck, and you are then called a regular sub. There is always the chance that if you do well and there is a vacancy, you may be hired for the next term. The only alternative is day-to-day work, a special form of torture that involves running from one school to another, one day here, one day there. I never did that, but it does not require much imagination

to realize what a frightful experience it must be. A young, untried teacher has little enough status and self-confidence as it is, and shuttling about from school to school soon reduces him to a state in which he doubts his own ability to teach anything. And how does one get out of the impasse? Only through a long, tedious, and discouraging process.

As I have said, the board will not allow you to take the examination for a regular license unless you have a master's degree. To enable you to complete this requirement, the city sponsors what is called a fifth-year plan in education. You can earn your master's degree without paying tuition if you study education at one of the city colleges. Thousands of young teachers and graduate students avail themselves of this opportunity to complete their licensing requirements, but it is not always as good a plan as it sounds. My contact with it was the first thing to make me think seriously of leaving the school system.

I had taught for a year before enrolling under the plan, but when I finally did, I began going to school two nights a week while teaching. I had to take the majority of credits in education; the rest I could elect in my major subject, English. The English classes were good; the ones in education appalling. They were taught for the most part by professors who spoke as if they had never been inside a city school. Many were from other parts of the country or had taught there, so that their idea of adolescent education came from experiences that might bear absolutely no relationship to conditions in New York or any other large American city.

The teacher's day is never an easy one, but it is worse when the teacher is a student as well—putting in six exhausting hours and then dragging to school at night. Since it was impossible for me to go home before attending

graduate school, I usually arrived in a disheveled, comatose state after having eaten hurriedly somewhere and then, bearing books, papers, and other impedimenta, pressed on to class, where my eyes frequently closed from sheer physical inability to pay attention. Forcing myself to pay attention, I found that most of the people in the class just argued with the professor, sometimes good humoredly, sometimes bitterly, but mostly irrelevantly. Since the professor was an adherent of the reigning educational theory, he believed that he must remain as inconspicuous as possible, even to the point of sitting at the back of the room, and he would not make too much of an effort to bring order out of this chaos. The din assaulted your eardrums with a steady pressure that numbed your brain and allowed you to recover only long enough to copy next week's assignment—which might run something like this: "Listen to six daytime, child-centered radio programs, and show how they could be used to impress upon your classes the need for regular amounts of Vitamin B₁ in their diet." Then the subway home, a few papers corrected, high-school lessons planned or graduate-school lessons studied, and finally the oblivion of sleep. I soon learned to appreciate the quiet, interesting English classes. It was pleasant to retrogress into the world of Pope and Milton after an hour or so of the sound and fury of contemporary pedagogical opinion.

I spent two terms absorbing hours upon hours of this "educationese," and when I returned for my second year of graduate study, I decided that something must be wrong. What I was being taught about teaching was not what I knew teaching to be. I wanted to learn how to be a better teacher, how to help my students improve themselves. I was eager to learn the best ways to arm them with knowledge, virtue, purpose, and grace. Since I was a teacher my-

self, I knew the difficulties involved in achieving these aims. I knew what my school was like. But I loved the children. I loved them in this way: I wanted to teach them to speak and read and write properly, and I wanted to give them values as well, have them think about honor, justice, truth, freedom. I saw, as I taught them day by day, that many of my children knew little of these things—the skills and the virtues alike. I felt the necessity, the urgency, of teaching them, and so I went to school again myself to learn how to do so in the best possible way.

But graduate school did not consider my problem a problem at all. I listened, with amazement and finally with dismay, as professors and students told of the wonders of public-school teaching today, how fine and useful it was, what excellent citizens it was making of the young people whom it did not presume to teach, but rather gently guided. Many of the speakers rejoiced that the virtues—honor, truth, and freedom—were not now considered as important as they once were. When I said that I thought they were more important than ever, I was told, "How old-fashioned you are." When I suggested that discipline—formal, immediate, obvious, administered directly by the teacher—was good for a child, they said, "You will make your students products of fear." I said, "See here. You and I seem to be talking about two different things. I spend six hours every day in a public high school. You tell me the millennium has arrived. I know it has not. Tell me rather how I can improve the condition of my students. I want things to be the way you say they already are. Can you help me?" They said, "If you do not change your ideas to conform to those of this institution, you will not receive a graduate degree."

I began to fight for what I considered right. After all, I reasoned, why not? I was as well qualified as the next

person to talk about school conditions. At first I was hesitant, but since the great pride of this institution was its advantage over private and parochial schools in the diversity of the opinions it tolerated, I began to speak out, expecting disagreement but expecting, too, as honest a hearing for my ideas as I gave others for theirs. I was right on the first count and wrong on the second. It was decided that I was reactionary, a medievalist, for saying that the liberal arts were an integral part of anyone's education, and worst of all, a traditionalist, for expressing the belief that there was no learning without discipline. But these things were never said in anger or vindictiveness, even though tempers got short on occasion. I liked my fellow students and learned much from them. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for the faculty.

The thing that finally disgusted me, however, was the discovery that the whole program was, philosophically speaking, dishonest—at least in the college I attended. The situation came to a head in this manner. I had written a paper for one education course in which I reported on the results of a questionnaire on the practicality and effectiveness of the State Education Law, the law that requires boys and girls to remain in school until the age of seventeen, no matter how many subjects they fail. My questions had been passed by the professor as free from bias before they were distributed. The questionnaire was circulated, at a great expense of time, among a score of teachers at school. When the results were tabulated, the answers supported the conclusion that the law only succeeded in creating a backlog of serious discipline cases, giving rise to supervisory and record-keeping duties that fully occupied many teachers whose talents and energies could have been used to greater advantage in the classroom. The paper was submitted and

was eventually returned with a low mark. It was then that I was told that if I did not change my ideas to conform to current educational beliefs, I would never get my degree.

From then on I began to ask myself serious questions about the validity of the educational system in which I was employed. I had been told plainly that since I had not made up my mind their way, I was not to be trusted to make it up at all. So much for the education courses. And, eventually, so much for the master's degree. I finished out that term and never returned.

But suppose that you eventually do finish your studies for this degree and become a Master of the Art of Education. If you have been teaching while you study, it will have taken you four or five years to complete the preparation for your degree. If it happens that a regular examination is scheduled at this time, you may take it. If no examination is scheduled, you remain a substitute. The regular examination consists of the following parts: written (on subject matter and educational procedure), practical, and oral. The practical test entails your going to a high school (not your own) assigned by the Board of Examiners, to a class you have never seen before, and teaching a lesson, unknown to you beforehand, designated by the examiners, who sit at the back of the room and observe you while you teach. They will criticize the lesson plan you have been given approximately one and a half hours to devise, your questions to the children, your homework assignment, your handling of any discipline cases arising during the lesson, the tone of your voice, your dress, your posture, the temperature of the room, the level of the window shades, the width of the aisles, and the way you write on the blackboard. You have forty-five minutes to demonstrate your intelligence, poise, and ingenuity. The experience is shatter-

ing in itself, but the tension of the whole situation is underlined when you know that you may fail in the examination by failing in any one of its parts. These parts are not always given consecutively, so that years may elapse before the test is completed. Years more may elapse before the papers are graded and a list of appointments compiled, for everything depends on how many teachers are needed. Besides, there is no interchanging of licenses. You take the examination for elementary, junior, or senior high school, academic or vocational, and that is the extent of your validation. In other words, I, as a senior day high-school teacher, could not teach elementary school.

If you passed all parts of your test and received an appointment, you would most probably be assigned to a vocational school, since the few vacancies that occurred in academic high schools are generally taken by regular teachers transferring from other schools of the same kind. A vocational school is one in which more emphasis is put upon teaching trades and fostering manual skills than on academic courses, and it is the kiss of death for a teacher qualified to teach academic subjects. So here you are at last, a regularly appointed teacher, finally licensed by the Board of Education to teach on one level only—either elementary or secondary. You cannot, in the interests of self-preservation, contest an appointment (particularly a first one), and you must teach for thirty-five years before retiring on an inadequate pension. One might well be excused for asking if the game is worth the candle.

One of the first things you learn is that the board, which employs you and presumably has your best interests at heart, is usually bored with you. Nevertheless, some old-timers still refer to it in awed tones, and some of any age speak of it and its myriad departments with envy, for to be

assigned to the board is a great step upward. You gain prestige, and you get out of the classroom, and it is most teachers' secret ambition to get a nonteaching assignment in the teaching system. In fact, your colleagues might wonder at you, aloud, if you have been teaching a goodly number of years and are still grappling with the same number of classes you had when you started.

So the fact that you are licensed to teach does not ensure you a position. The licensee finds himself in the ambiguous position of a trainee who has no assurance that his training will ever be put to use. One feels like the barber who has never cut hair, the prima ballerina hidden in the chorus. This uncomfortable situation persists because there is no central hiring system for the substitute teacher. You may go to the board and ask what vacancies exist in your subject, and, if you can get one of the clerks to interrupt her own conversation long enough, you may get an answer. Should you find a school with a vacancy you can fill, there is still no hiring done at the Board of Education. The best you can do is get the name and address of the school in question, leap on your horse, and gallop forth. It is always advisable to present yourself in person; telephone conversations and, if it turns out that way, telephone commitments are curiously ineffectual. It takes infinite patience to get the person you want, and even when you have succeeded in doing that, the functionary at the other end of the wire does not appear to know why you are calling. Rumor has it that one can get wind of the better vacancies in advance if one knows a strategically located clerk whose work gives her information about those teachers who are retiring, resigning, or going on sabbatical. However, I cannot vouch for this means of getting a job as I did not use it. My means were more direct, but as it turned out, no less precarious.

A friend's parent, herself a teacher, knew that I was fully prepared and thoroughly licensed to teach English, and she asked me what I was going to do by way of a job. I told her I did not know, which was quite true, since I was still wrapped up in college festivities and the impending vacation. Overlooking my skittish attitude, she gave me the name and location of her school, whose English department would have a vacancy the following term, and the name of the woman whom I was to see.

I did not give much thought to the whole thing until a few weeks later, when the realization that I would not be returning to school in September suddenly deepened in me. Work was inevitable; I did not fancy myself in the role of the perennial scholar. I decided to try the school, since it was now the third week in June and the teaching staff for fall would have to be fairly well organized before classes recessed for the summer. I arrived about eleven in the morning one bright summer day, and the first sight to greet my eyes was that of two overgrown youths, draped on the foyer wall and sucking noisily on cigarettes. They took slant-eyed notice of me as I wended my confused way inside.

The chairman of the English department, who appeared to be chiefly concerned with my willingness to work in her office during my free time, interviewed me hurriedly and engaged me casually. It seemed to me to be a case of "You're here and we need someone and I'm tired, so you're hired." "Give your name to the clerk in Room 102," she said, brushing back her hair with a weary gesture. I, who never really expected to be hired (the idea of working without returning to school was still curiously unreal), found myself on the faculty, an English teacher.

"Dr. Shipley hired me for one of the positions in the English department. She said to give you my name and address," I told the woman in Room 102. She wrote the information on a little piece of paper that promptly disappeared into her cluttered desk.

She nodded brightly to me and folded her hands. I left. On my way to the bus stop, I turned to have another, more thoughtful look at the school. It seemed calm enough, but I kept remembering those two boys in the vestibule. And I had just committed myself to instructing them. Or so I thought.

The summer passed swiftly, and about the first week in September, I began to wonder why I had heard nothing from the school. I do not know what I expected but I expected something—perhaps a notice, like a draft notice: "Greetings, the principal and faculty look forward to seeing you on such and such a date." I decided to call them. Having at length established contact with someone in authority and stated my case three or four times, I finally learned that no one knew anything about me. I had forgotten the name of the person with whom I had left my own name and address, and everyone else with whom I spoke was in a state of total confusion. My story had begun to sound implausible even to me from having told it to so many skeptical listeners. The whole affair took on a hysterical tone, like a stunt pulled for a sorority initiation or an election bet. I was defeated, and called up my friend's mother to tell her so. She, in turn, was indignant and told me to hang on, that the battle was not yet lost. Of course, she was on the inside and was familiar with the administrative waste land where my feeble candidature lay smothered. Hang on I did, and I was finally told to present myself at the school next day, bright and early, license in

The System

Teachers in New York City schools are employed by the city and remotely supervised by the Board of Education. The board itself is headed by an elected president, who in turn is advised by a nine-man advisory group known as members of the board. Members of the board are appointed by the mayor. Subsidiary to the board and fanning out from it are numerous committees, each one charged with the carrying-out of some necessary function. In the following explanation I will confine myself to the board in its relationship to the public high schools.

The New York City Board of Education is an immense, top-heavy structure bearing comparison with an inverted pyramid—the teacher himself being at rock bottom. Near the top is the superintendent of schools, elected by the Board of Education and its chief executive officer, and the Board of Examiners, a group of men and women who help compose the licensing examinations given to all who want to teach in the high schools, and who later examine the speech of those candidates who have successfully completed the written part of the test. The Board of Examiners touches a teacher's life only when he is undergoing the laborious process of validation.

The two departments already mentioned, the Board of Education and its subsidiary, the Board of Examiners, have little real meaning to a teacher except on certain occasions. Moving down further into the pyramid, we see the teacher in a more specialized setting—his own school. The academic high school is headed by a principal and one or two administrative assistants who do no teaching whatsoever. Directly beneath them are specialized personnel, such as the deans, who are ultimately responsible for discipline among the

students, and the grade advisers, one for each term in the school, who supervise the programming of all students in their particular term. Deans, chairmen, and grade advisers do not teach five classes a day; neither do they have an official class, being relieved of two, three, or four classes so that they may use that time for their special assignments. We are now at the narrowest part of the structure where we find the teacher, teaching five classes a day, supervising a prefect class (and doing the attendant paper work), and carrying, probably, a very disagreeable building assignment. The ordinary teacher, who does most of the work around the school since he does most of the teaching, also gets the least credit. Strangely enough, the children seemed to be impressed with titles, and would not usually misbehave as much in the class of a grade adviser. This is due, I think, to some vague misunderstanding that the teacher so titled is not primarily a teacher at all but some kind of important record-keeper. Of course, this was sheer superstition on their parts, but it flourished. At any rate, a teacher is directly responsible for the greatest number of children, since his five classes plus prefect bring him into daily contact with about two hundred students. The higher one goes in the educational setup, the fewer children one meets, i.e., one teaches fewer children and is responsible for fewer. And the higher one goes, the more one's prestige is enhanced. Of course, such esteem is disproportionate, but that is the way it is. The teacher is the one who should be consulted by fact-finding committees and commissions from the board, since the teacher actually teaches. But that is not done. What more frequently happens is that some university professor from the Midwest is invited East, and to the accompaniment of praise and a largish budget is invited to study our public schools and find a solution to problems of

cutting, delinquency, vandalism, and dope-taking that probably do not exist in the small town from which he comes. Nevertheless, that is the way it works—from the board to the principal, filtering down through the school to the individual teacher, and through the teacher to the students.

The teacher is responsible to the department supervisor for his classes—what they are taught, how they behave, and how they progress. It is this person, the teacher's immediate boss, who observes the teacher once or twice a term (more for a beginning teacher) and gives him hints and recommendations on his teaching procedutes. The relationship between teacher and chairman is, from a professional point of view, the strongest and most important in the entire system. The only others in a supervisory capacity that the teacher is liable to be in contact with are the deans of discipline and the grade advisers. The teacher refers serious disciplinary problems to the deans, and the grade adviser is intimately concerned with the prefect class's records and programs, but there is little contact with anyone else and next to none with the principal. And if the teachers sometimes find themselves lost in the hierarchy, the students themselves are frequently baffled. One term there was an excess of substitutes, and the principal himself was observing all of us to derermine who would stay, instead of leaving the choice to the chairman. He had just left my classroom when a youngster turned his quizzical face to me and asked, "Who's he?"

Occasionally, however, other people and other agencies intrude or make themselves felt in a teacher's life. In my experience, the most important of these was the one concerned with curriculum planning and research, the one that decided what new things were to be taught and what new ways of teaching were to be tried. In the sense that it

was concerned with things taught, real power was concentrated in this committee. Here again, teachers themselves were not consulted on what might be eliminated from the school curriculum or what might profitably be added to it.

Suppose, then, that right in the middle of your efforts to plan lessons on a novel—say, *The Yearling*—the planners decide that novels are a dead loss, and that from now on it must be books on vocational guidance. No more wasting time on “literature”; what we want is something that can be useful later on, so let’s break out the books on carpentry, truck driving, and automobile mechanics. This power to shift a whole term’s work from one area of interest to another is certainly power.

One other, more nebulous form of contact with the higher-ups in the school system arises in connection with teacher benefits. There is always something in the air—a raise, a day off with pay for religious observance, an election to fill a pension board vacancy, the dismissal of so many substitutes in January—and petitions are very much in evidence. Faculty meetings ring to the sound of impassioned voices. You might be interested in one or two examples of the causes of so much agitation; here, then, are two rulings that were binding on teachers: No teacher could leave the state for any length of time for any reason while school was in session; substitute teachers got no sick-leave benefits whatsoever—if you were out, you were docked a per diem wage even though you were on a full-term assignment. Per diem subs are those poor souls who trek from one school to another taking their teaching where they find it, and since they get no summer checks as such, their day-by-day wage is higher. It is always the higher wage that is deducted. Such obviously unfair practices are the rule rather than the exception.

However, on the other side of the ledger, there are a few signs that are hopeful, even if a cheerful sign in this educational mess means that the whole structure is probably cracking from within. There is evidence that many educational theorists are becoming disenchanted; they see that things are not turning out the way they thought they would. But I do not think that this means immediate, or even eventual, action in an opposite direction. The state of being disenchanted is an inactive state, for a while at least, and in the intervening period nothing is really settled, and nothing is certain except the fact that we no longer want what we have. It is at such a time that any suggestions may be acted upon merely for the sake of taking action, and I think we are in such a time now. People rush in with all sorts of wild ideas, and the chances are that extreme measures will be preferred to a middle course. To theorists the middle way is always odious.

The good signs, therefore, the few cheerful notes, exist mainly in the barely audible admissions that things are not what they could be. The snag is that it takes so long for the machinery to be put in motion. Years may elapse before anything concrete is accomplished. And with the scrapping of the progressive system, it will take a long time indeed to make visible progress, because the dedication to the system in the first instance was so complete and because it still has many firm and influential adherents. These include most of the theorists who control curriculum planning, many examiners and principals, nearly all chairmen, since they received their higher licenses under the new system and had to agree with it to pass, and practically every high-school and elementary teacher under thirty, since they were trained to think that way in their teacher-training courses and must continue to think, or at least appear to think, that

way if they hope for a permanent appointment and any advancement whatsoever after that.

It may be asked how I fitted into his picture. What place was there for me? After all, I had no real knowledge of what the inside of a public high school was like, and in that respect, I was different from most of the other teachers, who had gone to public schools themselves, including college and graduate school, and then returned to teach in them, bringing with them a basic realization of what they were up against even though many years might have elapsed in the interim. My practice teaching had been in a girls' school, and my own education had been for the most part in private parochial schools. However, I had gone to a public elementary school and remembered quite vividly some of the things that had happened there—a teacher crying because a class would not be quiet, grinning boys putting tacks on the seats, and so on. I knew, therefore, that these things happened, and I realized with foreboding that as the students got older and more knowledgeable, the tricks were bound to become more violent and more complex. And so they did.

Even though my own background as a student differed so radically from those of my own students, I know that it was not an obstacle to my becoming, in time, a successful teacher. Even though the things they did during their own time and the way they approached their studies were far removed from my own experience as an adolescent, I do not think that it precluded me from understanding them. In fact, I found the two things most frequently cited (by some of my fellow teachers) as barriers to my becoming a good teacher—my "restricted" background and my youth—were the very things that helped me most in the early days, the days when I seriously wondered at 3:00 P.M. each

day if I could take it on the morrow. My classes liked the fact that I was young; indeed, to many of them, it excused the fact that I was a teacher. Later on, when I had begun to teach the upper terms, I found that some of the older students thought it a good thing that I, in some ways at least, was different from them. They had begun to learn the value of diversity.

The other teachers, including those with whom I disagreed most violently, I liked, with only a few exceptions. They were good to me; many went out of their way to help me—and it was not until I had settled into teaching myself, and acquired that constant fatigue that is the occupational disease of teachers, that I realized how much of themselves they had given to help a newcomer. Before I left, four years after I began, I had made friends, with teachers and with students, and it hurt me more than I thought it would to leave.

No, the only way I could not fit into the public-school picture was on ideological grounds. When I arrived at the school for the first time and began my teaching career, I was prepared to believe in what I was doing and I was prepared to work hard to justify my belief. My undergraduate teacher training had certainly taught me enough about teaching according to the current educational philosophy. I was familiar with all of its terms, and even rather believed in it, as anyone would believe in an approach highly publicized as superdynamic in preference to an approach scorned as outdated and harmful. In the battle of the books, I was prepared to ally myself with the progressives. I cannot say that my allegiance was complete; it would be truer to say that if I had to choose, I would choose the new way in preference to the old. But like the man who

signed the marriage contract without seeing the bride, I was in for a big surprise.

So this dissatisfaction and uneasiness with things as I found them bothered me considerably. As I looked around me and saw the kind of children the schools were constrained to graduate, as I studied educational theory further and learned more about the ineffectualness of school procedures in discipline cases, I was increasingly disturbed. The schools were assuredly trying to do a lot of things for their students, but were they the right things? If the howling mobs in the corridors and the cheating "honor" students were the best we could hope for, then there did not seem to be much point in attempting to educate them at all. And worst of all was the hypocrisy of the glowing reports about new, vital movements in the schools, about how much good was being done, about how much better the schools were now than formerly. It seemed to me that there was very little success and a great deal of failure. I talked it over with many teachers; some agreed, most just shrugged and said, "Why get so upset about it? Forget it." But I could not forget it, just as I could not respect it.

Who could respect a system that had to an astounding degree every fault that systems are heir to—apathy, bureaucracy, inertia, and a total disregard for the individual, whether student or teacher? The student was someone to be experimented with, and the teacher was without standing; the whole vast, intricate machinery of the board seemed geared to his complete frustration and ultimate disillusionment. Of course, a certain amount of this is inevitable in any large body and is therefore to be expected, but the board should realize that the days are gone when it was considered a happy circumstance to be a teacher. It might have been something of the sort during the Great Depression,

but in relation to most large organizations today, with a comparable number of employees, the board and its devious machinations loom like social injustices in a Dickens novel.

For example, I had been teaching for about three weeks when I was "called to the board" for a physical examination. This is standard procedure for a substitute. The unexpected part, however, showed up in my subsequent check when it came out that I had been docked for the two or three hours I had spent at the board being declared physically fit to teach. Mind you, I *had* to appear for the examination at the appointed time, and the appointed time was a Friday morning. What infuriated me was not the loss of the money but the fact that some functionary, somewhere, actually put pencil to paper and took time from eternity to figure out how much three hours was worth from my niggardly wage. It is this myopic attention to trifles to the exclusion of larger issues, this petty concern over a few dollars while the children set fire to the schools and punch the teachers, that is characteristic of the Board of Education today. Never was so little done by so many.

A visit to the board invariably paid dividends of annoyance. Naturally, the higher a person rose and the more exalted his title became, the more recessed was his office. Each promotion took him farther away from the people he was supposed to help. This leaves the superintendent, or the secretary, or the supervisor, or what have you, free to look out the window or fade away for long lunches. Or file his nails. I remember having to see some assistant superintendent or other for accreditation of courses and being told that he was very busy and could not be disturbed. I was told, ominously, that I would have to wait. I did. I took a seat directly opposite the open door of his office, and from there I could see his bare uncluttered desk, its high gloss marred only by

the brass name plate that proclaimed to all and sundry that this was the very busy man himself. I watched in fascination for nearly three quarters of an hour while he painstakingly filed his fingernails. The inference made in the situation was characteristic. I did not mind being told that my man was out—that is done often enough everywhere. What I resented was the assumption that I or any other teacher seeking information from the proper source was such a knucklehead that I could not read this man's name on his name plate and realize that I was not considered important enough for the courtesy of a closed door or the person "out" to us.

This is a fair example of what the teacher is up against all along the line. Students and supervisors alike may consider you worthless, and the awful truth is that if you are treated long enough like a feeble-minded indentured servant, you begin to feel like one.

The Teachers

What, then, were the teachers like, the ones who survived the grueling process of regularization and finally were appointed to a city high school? What were the teachers like with whom I shared classrooms, lunches, and students? Well, they were nearly all intelligent, and a few were brilliant.

They were generally witty and well dressed. But not all of them should have been teachers. For on thing, many of them were desperately bad disciplinarians who compromised the whole profession. There were men and women, their minds ideologically captive, who never should have been allowed to influence or instruct the unformed adolescent consciousness. There were those to whom teaching was

enced you become, the easier it is to spot, until soon you can even anticipate the exact form it will take by looking at the class on the first day of the new term. It is always a challenge to your authority. Let your students demolish your authority, and they will progress to your person, commenting on your clothes, your looks, and your wits. And here is where the importance of reputation enters in. Once a teacher establishes himself, the assessments will be less frequent, unless they are deliberately provoked by teacher or pupil as a show of strength. But if a teacher is known to be a lax disciplinarian, he will be challenged by the whole class at all times. On the rare occasions when he wants to "tighten" up the class for an observation, he will go through tortures. The class will know that this is not his customary procedure but only a momentary spurt of energy. It will be resented as well as ignored. They will feel doubly cheated, first, for having to listen to him shout and carry on, and then for his having switched from disinterested observer to teacher. They detest change. They don't like to be upset and to have to change their opinion once they have formed it.

Today a teacher must fight for every ounce of respect he gets and keeps. If a person is weak-willed, unable to command obedience, he will never be a teacher. How can he? No one will listen to him, and he will be despised for his weakness, since all classes want to be disciplined, the bad ones especially. Certainly, all students will give any teacher a hard time, the hardest they can, but they will be anxiously waiting all the while for signs of his ultimate command. If he can master his classes and if he has a knowledge of his subject, his chances of survival are good. But he must be fair, and swift to punish appropriately and justly. He must be on the job when he is bone-tired and emotion-

about environment, guilt feeling, frustrations, reading readiness, education for life, and the like. But it is mostly talk. I do not think that the child is an individual to them, a person endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights. He is a study, a case, a problem.

A great number of teachers today, particularly the younger ones, talk a lot about "love and affection" for a child, but they seem to lack something—humility perhaps—that will make their love for a child a real feeling and not a synthetic heartiness. Their interest is not spontaneous, calm, and genuine, as that of a mother or father whose love for their child is deep and abiding and does not need to be constantly expressed. Theirs is rather the unconcerned relative's holiday bid for affection that is manifested in extravagant gifts and secret treats. It is the real love that wisely and temperately chastises the loved one for his own sake. It is the false love that unquestioningly approves—and spoils. It is generally held in educational circles today that it is impossible to be strict with a child and still like him and have him like you. But is there any other way to love a child except by "raising him in the way he should go" and making sure that he follows it?

I suggest further that the teachers who are all sweetness and light are wrong on another important count. They are mixed up in the matter of when to supervise a child and when to leave him alone. They would have him left alone in the classroom, when he should be watched, when, in company with some enterprising companion, he might be tempted to set fire to the wardrobe or splash paint on the walls. At such times, they say, he must be left alone, self-guided (and self-disciplined?) to express himself. But the parts of a child that should be private, even inviolate, are those in which the progressivists make the greatest show of

"What do you think of me?" urged the teacher.

"I think you're a louse," replied the child.

I have been interested in teaching all my life, as student, teacher, and combination of both. I often asked myself, groggy after twelve hours in classrooms, what I was doing at that job. What was anyone doing at a job that drained his energy, ruined his nervous system, weakened his eyes, and flattened his feet? Why was it that the longer I taught, the more annoyed I became at what was expounded in my graduate classes under the guise of proper educational techniques? The more familiar I became with the situations in which I had to teach, the more I began to suspect what I myself was being taught. I finally, and sadly, decided, on the basis of my own experience and on what I saw and heard around me, that there was no place for me in the school system.

But surely I was not the only one in the system who thought it was wrong. However, other people who shared my opinions were not in a position to leave. They were regularly appointed teachers, with money invested in pension funds, with family responsibilities. They were not at an age where change is possible, much less advisable. They were, in their own words, "caught." They continue to do the best job possible under existing conditions, containing themselves in patience until retirement. There are very few younger teachers who are not wholly devoted to the progressive system; to be young and in opposition to current educational theory is an anomaly. If you do oppose it, and say so, your younger colleagues are eager to predict your ultimate failure. I was told by a fellow teacher one day that I would never be successful because I had attended private schools and "didn't understand the children in the public schools." The inference was that he himself was

going to be a smash. A few months later, he was beaten up in the school cafeteria.

True, I had attended private schools that were at the same time parochial schools, a fact that was in the eyes of most of my colleagues a great handicap and a waste of time. But I had also attended a public school and was now teaching in a public school. I had run the educational gauntlet and was even beginning to feel overschooled, for while I went to graduate school to learn more about the arts of teaching and the appreciation of English, I taught students who could not even spell. Most teachers, I learned, were overeducated, most students undereducated, and the gulf widened constantly.

What of us, then, the ones who did not agree? I can recount what one man suffered at the hands of those whose principle of tolerating all beliefs was temporarily in eclipse. The matter concerned his refusal to follow a chairman's directive because he could not in conscience do so. He used his conscience as his defense when he was officially called upon to explain his action, and he was laughed at. This is a man whom any parent should feel honored to have as a teacher for his child, a man any board of education should be proud to present to youth in the role of teacher. But he was expendable because he was uncompromising. It is a disgraceful commentary on the New York City school system that a man of this caliber was officially reprimanded for following his conscience in order to safeguard the children in his care, while other men, still teaching, are known by their fellow teachers (and their students) to be completely absorbed in the pursuit of the more advanced girls in their classes.

Nevertheless, those among us who held unpopular opinions tried to speak up at faculty meetings, which were

held regularly once a month. The principal presided and the teachers, who were obliged to attend, acted in ways very much like their students. Many would come prepared with private work to while away the time; others were eager to sound off on a diversity of subjects. Once in a while there would be a speaker, a teacher striving toward a higher license, who reported on some current project, or else an "expert" from the board. I remember one meeting at which a fellow teacher was presenting a paper about the great need for our students to feel free from fear when they entered a classroom. I rose and said that he had the problem all wrong—there were classrooms I was afraid to enter.

Everyone knew that the little speech was being made to conform with current educational theory, and everyone also knew that the speaker, a notoriously ineffectual teacher, was in the throes of taking examinations, preparing papers, suffering interviews and observations that he hoped would bring him a chairmanship. His audience seemed unswayed by his words; most of those present just yawned elaborately in his face. He finished weakly with a further plea for more love and affection for our students, and the meeting was adjourned.

When I made my contribution about fear and the classrooms, my principal feeling was one of anger. My anger was directed against the system for advocating a theory that certainly had been valid when children of other eras were early placed in workhouses or mines, but which had lost all meaning in a world where, according to approved theory, children ran a school like a club and followed few dictates other than their own whims and desires. When I had spoken, there was a gasp of spontaneous laughter. I laughed too at the sheer idiotic futility of the thing. The reality of the school situation as all of us knew it and the

going to be a smash. A few months later in the school cafeteria.

True, I had attended private schools same time parochial schools, a fact that most of my colleagues a great handicap at. But I had also attended a public school and was in a public school. I had run the education was even beginning to feel overschooled, to graduate school to learn more about the and the appreciation of English, I taught still not even spell. Most teachers, I learned, were most students undereducated, and the gradually.

What of us, then, the ones who did not recount what one man suffered at the hands of the principle of tolerating all beliefs was temporary. The matter concerned his refusal to follow a directive because he could not in conscience use his conscience as his defense when he was ordered upon to explain his action, and he was laughed at a man whom any parent should feel honored to have a teacher for his child, a man any board of education be proud to present to youth in the role of teacher he was expendable because he was uncompromising. a disgraceful commentary on the New York City education system that a man of this caliber was officially reprimanded for following his conscience in order to safeguard the children in his care, while other men, still teaching, are not by their fellow teachers (and their students) to be completely absorbed in the pursuit of the more advanced in their classes.

Nevertheless, those among us who held unpopular opinions tried to speak up at faculty meetings, which were

held regularly once a month. The principal presided and the teachers, who were obliged to attend, acted in ways very much like their students. Many would come prepared with private work to while away the time; others were eager to sound off on a diversity of subjects. Once in a while there would be a speaker, a teacher striving toward a higher license, who reported on some current project, or else an "expert" from the board. I remember one meeting at which a fellow teacher was presenting a paper about the great need for our students to feel free from fear when they entered a classroom. I rose and said that he had the problem all wrong—there were classrooms I was afraid to enter.

Everyone knew that the little speech was being made to conform with current educational theory, and everyone also knew that the speaker, a notoriously ineffectual teacher, was in the throes of taking examinations, preparing papers, suffering interviews and observations that he hoped would bring him a chairmanship. His audience seemed unswayed by his words; most of those present just yawned elaborately in his face. He finished weakly with a further plea for more love and affection for our students, and the meeting was adjourned.

When I made my contribution about fear and the classrooms, my principal feeling was one of anger. My anger was directed against the system for advocating a theory that certainly had been valid when children of other eras were early placed in workhouses or mines, but which had lost all meaning in a world where, according to approved theory, children ran a school like a club and followed few dictates other than their own whims and desires. When I had spoken, there was a gasp of spontaneous laughter. I laughed too at the sheer idiotic futility of the thing. The reality of the school situation as all of us knew it and the

false and sentimental picture presented by the previous speaker were too disparate. So we *all* laughed. Why not? There seemed to be nothing else we could do about it.

At that faculty meeting, we were addressed by a fellow teacher eager to climb the promotional ladder. The one I describe now was a cozy affair at which we were subjected to the pomposities of an expert from the board. It was, of course, compulsory to attend; only those eager to make an impression on someone would have attended voluntarily. We were unable to use the auditorium that afternoon, and the meeting was held in the "music room," an elongated classroom with a dais in the front, supporting a movable blackboard and a large, battered grand piano. It was just coming into spring, and strong shafts of sunlight barred the room. We were semidormant, slumped in our seats, and yawning. We were vague and, as the meeting progressed, restless. There was, however, quiet in the ranks, broken only by the rustle of newspapers held down behind the seat in front and the irritating snaps of the gum-chewers. But what started as a typical meeting began at one point in the proceedings to show signs of coming to life.

The expert had arrived and been ushered to the dais with a fair show of deference. He was a small man and looked quite incongruous in front of the grand piano. For a while I amused myself by picturing him, arm extended and head tilted back, about to burst into song, or swaying rhythmically over a violin. Soon I began to hear what he was saying. I cannot, of course, remember the exact words but, generally, he was advocating the X-G program that was still on an experimental basis in some schools in New York, ours among them. This program, in brief, envisioned taking some very dull pupils, selected on the basis of their I.Q., and putting them in a special class where they would be taught



their subjects for four periods a day by the same teacher. I don't know how the teacher was selected. The program was later expanded to include the very bright, who were treated in the same way. The idea was that both extremes would benefit from special treatment, and as far as I could gather, there was a great deal of latitude allowed both groups in discipline as well as in curriculum planning. It was concerning the latter feature of the plan that the expert and I exchanged views.

I remember the remark that prompted my question. He said, about the X-G program in particular and all classes in general, that "we must avoid the danger of a fixed curriculum." I must have been trying that term to evolve some curriculum of my own, trying desperately hard, say, to teach poetry to an unwilling class and wishing I had some guide to help me, for the remark rankled. It bothered me because here was a man who had got himself into a soft job at the board, telling some hard-worked and pushed-to-the-limit teachers that it would be dangerous to have a regular plan of study. It would be dangerous to have a logical progression of topics to be taught in certain terms, dangerous to teach speech improvement, grammar, reading, and writing. Dangerous to whom, I asked myself? Dangerous to him, obviously. Dangerous to his position and his salary. Dangerous to the mushrooming "experiments" that subtly but surely outgrow their experimental status and become permanent fixtures before most people are aware of what has happened.

He finished. A few questions followed, dutiful and congratulatory. Someone wanted to know when all classes would be following this X-G procedure. He smiled archly.

"Soon. Soon, let's hope. Of course, you must remember it's still only an experiment, but we're on the right track."

I raised my hand.

"Yes?"

"I'm only a sub, but I've been teaching for two years. I'd like to ask you what the danger is in a fixed curriculum?"

"You didn't understand me," he snapped after a pause. "And, besides, you answered your own question."

I sat down, more confused than ever. But out of his deliberate evasiveness grew a vague satisfaction. He did not have an answer.

Very few teachers are ever consulted on curriculum or procedural changes. Yet many will blindly support the very system that ignores them in order to get ahead professionally. Of this there is no doubt. Some are more interested in the pay check and pension than the philosophies they teach. Such people ally themselves with any group in vogue and are small credit to the profession.

There are others, men and women who make teaching a noble profession. These people, well trained in their field of study, are experienced in dealing with young people, and they like young people. They are firm, fair disciplinarians, who strive against back-breaking odds to instill in their students a genuine appreciation of the basic virtues. I worked with a dean of boys who took home more work with him on weekends than another man might do in a week—records of court cases in which students were involved, follow-ups on interviews, and endless reports on the boys he served so well and helped so much. They respected him, which proves that even wayward and violent youngsters can be impressed by virtue if it is exemplified in the right people. One woman volunteered to take a class of problem girls while suffering from constant, excruciating pain in her back, and even hard and cynical girls knew that her interest in them was genuine and not aimed at a de-

partment chairmanship. Yet no one called her an expert. She just did the work. These teachers have courage of the rarest kind, the courage that is silent, unremittent, and unspectacular. It must be innate and vital, or it will not stand up under the demands made on it by countless daily irritations; it must be bred in the bone, or it is quickly forgotten. Teachers with *this quality are worthy of the admiration of the public, but they do not get it.* They have long since ceased to expect it from their superiors or their students.

And so it goes. You are tolerated by your students, overworked by the system, misunderstood by many parents, and patronized by politicians. The only people happy to do business with you are the loan offices.

The Students

Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, the teacher is successful in his job only to the degree that he is successful with the dumbest pupil. Teaching depends upon, lives in, and wins or loses by its students as the success of a play depends upon the audience. And the teaching carried on in a large high school simply cannot afford to register a mere *succès d'estime*. Teaching comes down to the individual child, and the individual child, when you finally meet him, is likely to be very much like this one—this boy whose shoes are armed with metal cleats, who wears a heavy, many-zippered leather jacket and a pair of gloves thrust cavalierly through the shoulder straps. The gaping pockets of his Army fatigue trousers are used to stow his school supplies—a comb, cigarettes, and a knife. He is savagely barbered, but his hair is not his only uncivilized attribute. He speaks:

"Waaaaa?"

"What are you doing in the hall?"

"Nuttin. Um gonna baetroom."

"Where's your pass? You know you need a pass to leave your class."

"Wa pass? I ain' got no pass."

"Where do you belong? Your teacher wouldn't let you leave the room without a pass."

"She din gimme no pass. She's crazy."

"All right. Back to class."

"Naaaaa. I ain' gawn back that stupid class. It's boring."

"I didn't ask for your opinion. I asked for your pass."

"I toll ya. I ain' got none."

"Don't raise your voice to me. What room did you come from?"

"One oh tree."

"I'll see you to the door."

"Don' do me no favors."

"The pleasure is all mine."

I am in luck. He comes, though grudgingly and with great mutterings of disgust. Hugging the wall, he slinks along behind me. He stops at the back door of a classroom.

"Wai' min. I gotta see my cousin."

"No you don't."

"Aliiii. I mean it. I woon't kid ya. I gotta cousin."

"I don't doubt it, but this is not the time for family chats."

"Chats? Chats? Wazzat? I gotta talk ta him."

"Come on. Stop stalling."

"Look. Wha's wrong? I just stan' here, and when the bell rings, I meet my cousin. You dou' needa wait. I wou' make no noise."

"Don't try to make a deal with me. I'm taking you back to class."

"Why? Ha? Jus' tell me why."

"Because you're out without a pass."

"Since when ya needa pass to leave this class? Where am I—a concentration camp?"

"No. You're in school."

"You're tellin *me*."

"I certainly am."

"You won' lemme stay here—nice and quiet?"

"No."

"Ya don' trus' me."

"Absolutely not."

"I gotta go back?"

"Most emphatically."

"Yeah?"

"Yes."

He shrugs. We start again. I walk a little faster; he walks a little slower. Suddenly, he starts to sing.

"*Stop that noise.*"

"That ain' noise. I'm singin."

"Listen. I'm losing my patience. I want you to keep still and come with me. And not another sound out of you. Understand?"

"But—"

"And *no more arguments*. That's final."

"Ahrigh. Ahrigh. Don' get mad."

We start again.

"Just a minute. I gotta comb my hair."

He wets his comb at a drinking fountain. His classroom is right around the corner, and he hopes the bell will ring before I deliver him to the door.

"Now what are you doing?"

"I tol' ya. I'm just gonna comb my hair."

He moves to the door of the nearest classroom, and, using the pane of glass as a mirror, rearranges his startling coiffure.

"Get away from that door. And get into your own room. Quick."

"I donno where it is."

"It's right there. And if I see you in the hall again without a pass, I'll report you to the dean. Now, *get in*."

"Ahrigh. Ahrigh. Don' yell."

I open the door. The teacher looks at us inquiringly.

"I found this boy in the hall without a pass."

The teacher looks crestfallen. He had hoped "this boy" would be gone all period.

But let's look further. There is also, in every large city high school, a classroom or auditorium known as the Study Hall. Here is opportunity to observe how proficient some of our students are in interpreting social situations (*pace* Dewey), and how accurately they adapt themselves to differing personalities.

Our Study Hall was held in the school auditorium, located on the first floor just opposite the main entry—making it ridiculously easy to walk from "study" straight out the front door. There were five exits all told, not counting the wings of the stage. Into this hall were thrown one hundred and fifty students and two teachers for forty minutes a day, five days a week. But even this impossible situation had its amusing side, though most of the amusement is apparent only in retrospect. We were aware of Arthur before we discovered Mr. Belknap, so let him be introduced first. Arthur interpreted the social situation in the Study Hall immediately upon arriving and within a few days had or-

ganized his clique, all dilettantes like himself who never cut Study Hall, for where Arthur was, there their hearts were also. It was apparent that he was going to play the part for all it was worth when he made his first entrance through the side door at the front of the hall, wearing baby-blue pistol pants, a gray Homburg, and an undershirt. He had a mane of yellow hair that combined with his staring eyes and slack mouth to give him a distressingly vague look. He was recognized immediately by his following, and there welled up a great tribal shout of joy, to which Arthur responded by opening his arms in a fond paternal gesture and shouting, "Um here. Um here."

Most of us in charge of the hall waged a constant battle with him (he disrupted the group every time he appeared, he argued about everything that we said whether it concerned him or not, and, worst of all, he *was* funny) that left us verging on nervous exhaustion but did not bother Arthur in the least. He adapted to us by ignoring us.

Arthur and Co. came to study every day because they were having so much fun. A typical period would be one in which Arthur arrived five or ten minutes late (thereby giving his audience time to arrive, get settled, glance at *The News*) and then proceeded, in a loud voice, to volunteer numerous excuses for not being on time. This exchange was always audible to the front rows of the Hall, and so his *bons mots* were passed back with successive howls of appreciative laughter until the place echoed with it. Such sallies as "My wife made me wash the dishes," or "I wuz dreamin' about ya, Mrs. Beal, an I didn' wanna wake up," were always well received. After about five minutes of preliminary jokes, he would flop down into a seat, hang his legs over the chair in front, burrow down until his head rested on the back rest—and sing. Arthur's songs were al-

"Um leavin. Um goin. Will ya miss me? Sure ya will. For who will be wit ya when Um far away, when Um far away from you? Good-by. Good-by."

He leaped onto the stage and called his last words to us over the mournful sound of tuning up. "God bless you all," he cried, and accompanied his farewell with a flourish of his gray Homburg and many blown kisses.

School also affords its pupils contact with commercial activities. In the school cafeteria, many monetary transactions are completed having nothing to do with the buying and selling of chow mein and pickles. The cafeteria in a large school is nobody's fault. It is necessary to feed the students, and if there are five thousand students, you must feed five thousand. So there is a cafeteria, and there are teachers assigned to "police" it. Duties entailed are the maintenance of a certain degree of order that consists mainly in stopping the children from throwing sandwich crusts and empty milk containers at one another and refuse on the floor, breaking up fights, throwing out people and dogs who do not belong there, and ferreting out and breaking up betting rings and extortion rackets.

Well, now. A minority, but an active, clever, and problem-producing minority, in a large city high school will be so interested in greater commercial activities that it will organize, on a small but workable scale, a betting ring prepared to handle wagers on sports events inside or outside the school. It is rarer, but by no means entirely unknown, for a boy to be involved with an extramural group, as was a former student of mine who boasted that he made more money than I did by "running beer for the bookie." But there exists an even more serious situation, and that is the extortion racket run mostly by girls. The kind of girl who goes in for this is by far the most difficult behavior problem

that a teacher is likely to meet. They wear sullen, sneering, violently painted faces, speak in gutter talk, and are frighteningly ungirlish. Their plan of operation is simple. A group of them congregates in the cafeteria during one of the regular periods, and under cover of the noise and confusion seizes on some nice little girl, forces her into the washroom, and takes her lunch money. If she refuses, they beat her up. Very few refuse; they know it is wiser to give up the money.

To young people like this, school is a clobhouse, a place of amusement, a convenient place for getting cheap lunches, meeting friends, and settling grudges. If nothing else happens to engage their interest, they can always smash a few windows so that their trip will not have been in vain.

But what of the others? Obviously, all the children are not bad, but the ones I have just described may become the majority; the others are just lost in the rush. A teacher with a class of forty students, thirty-nine average, noisy children, and one problem boy or girl, will spend most of the term chasing after the one bad one, checking up on his absences and latenesses, attempting to extract stray pieces of work from him, arguing with him, putting up with his moods, writing reports on him to dean and grade adviser, and chasing his friends and followers from the classroom door. The teacher will be grateful that the others are fairly cooperative, and they will of necessity be put in the shade. I say of necessity, because it is hard enough to be teacher, mother, psychologist, secretary, guidance director, and old buddy to two hundred adolescents and impossible to be these things if a single child monopolizes one's energies. In public high schools, there are certain courses of study that all students must take. For example, all must study English for four years, history for three. Since these classes are required, children of all intelligence levels must be taught,

and consequently there is grading of classes for all compulsory subjects. Initially, the students' I.Q. is accepted as the determining factor; the smart ones go into an honor class, the average into a regular class, and the slow into a "general" class. The difference in classes is denoted by a letter after the class designation: H for honor, G for general, and A, B, or C for average. After a child had spent one term in a special class, it was usually up to the teacher in charge of that class to continue a child in the H or G class, take him out of the special group and put him into an average group, or put a student from an average group into a special class. The theory behind this elaborate programming was to give the brighter classes harder work, the regular classes ordinary work, and the slow classes easier work, so that all would accomplish the same task in different ways. What actually happened was that the G classes became catchalls for the discipline cases of the school and were frequently impossible to teach for that very reason. You are forced to concentrate on the ones who misbehave because they are disturbers of the peace, and you and they cannot operate simultaneously. But let us leave these disagreeable characters for a while.

There are, in the public high schools, some of the finest boys and girls I have ever met. And the curious, wonderful fact is that they can go through school without ever seeming to be influenced or upset by the others. They look upon them as different from themselves; they are quite tolerant of them, do not attempt to bait or antagonize them. They will frequently commiserate with the teacher when they find one of the problem cases in their class—always looking, however, to the teacher to chastise and silence him. If he is noisy or annoying enough, they may occasionally give him an impatient glance or even tell him to "shut up," but

most of the time they are content to let the teacher take the lead. They furnish you moral support, in the form of sympathetic glances and asides, but naturally, even these good children relish the battle of wits between teacher and student.

Let me illustrate. I have in mind a certain class I taught, of sixth term high-school students (about sixteen years of age). The level of intelligence was not easily defined; in the same class were boys and girls of superior intelligence, average intelligence, and a few to whom school, and particularly the study of English, was one huge joke. After a few weeks of trying to interest the laggards in modern British and American poetry, I concentrated on teaching the ones who were willing to be taught. In this particular class was a brawny youth with gaping teeth, a wide grin, and a perfect sense of timing. He usually came to class in dungarees and T shirt and would gaze at me with his goggle-eyed stare in mock interest, and then at just the right moment come out with a comment, such as, "Yuh had yuh hair cut"—after I had posed one of those pivotal questions about, say, the social implications of "The Man with the Hoe." He simply would not take any form of punishment, or threatened punishment, at all seriously, and when I reported him to the dean, he came to the next class grinning broadly and told me the dean had shown my report to him. "It was very interesting. You write good."

So here was this problem child in a good class. What happened to the others? What was their reaction to him? He didn't bother them as long as he was kept under control, and I think they enjoyed as much as he did the five or ten minutes that he and I spent in banter. I became aware that he would be reasonably quiet for the rest of the period if he had his inning at the very outset. And let me say that

it was no easy job bantering with Malcolm; that was how he had got as far as the third year in high school—by kidding or bribing his way—a grade of 65 in return for silence—all term.

The ordinary kids went through school in a kind of settled impatience to be through with it, but once in a while you met one or two, or, rarely, a whole class, eager to learn, and they were a pleasure to work with. They would do nearly everything you asked, they had a sense of humor and could laugh at themselves with sincerity. It was with such groups or individuals that teaching became a pleasure. Their attention, their willingness, was almost a tangible thing, and it was then brought home to me with great emphasis that a difficult child in a class such as this would tend to become better or at least relapse into silence and would not, at any rate, be a constant problem. It was through experiences such as this that I decided that special classes for the children who were retarded were not workable.

It was pleasant to meet the bright-eyed, well-groomed young women, the alert young men. It was sometimes inspiring, as in the case of the children who were crippled. One girl had a paralysis of the arm, another wore heavy braces on both legs and walked with crutches; some stammered seriously, and others had the pale faces and lassitude resulting from serious heart ailments. These children were allowed to use the elevator and were not required to take the regular health education classes, but otherwise they followed the same programs as the other boys and girls. The ones I knew were all well liked by the others. When I called upon them to speak or report in front of the class, we could all sense the nervousness they felt, and they, in turn, felt us pulling for them. That was one of the best things about my

students—their acceptance of physical handicap and suffering. They seemed to have met these things and become used to them at an early age.

One of the most worth-while and personally satisfying classes I ever taught was a reading clinic. Boys and girls from all terms were put into this special class for remedial work in reading. It was necessarily a small class, since each student was to receive daily personal attention. I found great pleasure in teaching it, and, in some ways and in some cases, was successful with it. On the first day of the term, I was apprehensive, for three or four of the children looked like genuine troublemakers. They were, but we had our battles early and then settled down to a peaceful term. I had not been specially trained in this sort of work, so I asked for hints from teachers who were, and then added some innovations of my own. I had the students read aloud until I could decide what their individual problems were, and this proved to be an enlightening process. Since they were willing to be taught, and were willing to accept criticism from me, I was able to get a fairly good idea of what had been neglected in their past training. Most had never learned to read, had never been drilled, over and over again, in the sounds of the vowels, consonants, and diphthongs. They did not know, for example, that *ow* is pronounced differently from *oo*. They could not spell. They were painfully conscious of their speech inadequacies and mispronunciations, and my hardest job at the beginning was to make them feel confident that when they were called on to recite neither I nor any of the others would ridicule them. It was hard, for they were very fond of heckling and very good at it. A misunderstanding of a word or phrase would bring a loud "Haa?" from the back of

the room, and guffaws when it was finally explained. But this gradually died down when they realized that we were engaged in a serious attempt to help them improve themselves, and a good spirit was finally established. None of these students was looking forward to college, and good speech and reading skills were not likely to be useful in their social circles, but it was proof of what could be done if they had confidence in a teacher. It meant that they were willing to meet you halfway.

I remember another class of second-termers, mostly average and below-average students, with a sprinkling of both extremes. I shall never forget the appeal in their eyes when two boys in the class began to make trouble.

One of their texts that term was the *Odyssey*, so watered down that Odysseus and his companions conversed in boy's club jargon. It was good for the students though; they liked the many illustrations, the elements of violent adventure, the strong, compelling narrative. Although obviously disappointed that Odysseus was as old as he was, they seemed willing enough to read along with me. There were only two boys in this class of forty-two who ever caused trouble, but when they did, it was classic. One was sullen; the other was a ventriloquist. For many weeks, I had wondered why the radiator, across the room from him, seemed to be knocking constantly, and why angry mutterings appeared to come from a boy who worked hard and gave no trouble. These sounds invariably came when I had my head down, reading, or was writing on the blackboard with my back to the class. I associated this minor but annoying disturbance with one boy, but I could prove nothing, and one of the cardinal rules of teaching is to be just in matters of discipline. The class knew all along what he was doing but could not tell me. I could feel them siding with me, but I

knew that I must find out the cause for myself. Had they disliked me it would have been much worse, for they would have given the pest vocal support instead of opposing him in silence. This unpopularity with those his own age, despite his great talent for baffling and annoying a teacher at the same time, made him try even harder. I discovered his secret quite by accident in conversation with another teacher, and the next time the noise occurred, confronted him with my information. He successively protested his innocence, accused the sullen youth, made facts at me, and finally lapsed into moodiness. Others in the class looked at me and smiled.

His inactivity was short-lived, however. The same boy he was trying to intimidate with his voice was finally hooked on a more serious charge. One day, when I was seated at my desk, head down, busily reading a section of the book to the class, I heard something whistling through the air. I looked up just in time to see my friend catch a clasp knife, thrown to him by the sullen youth.

"Let's have the knife."

"It ain't yours."

"It's not your's either."

"I lent it to my fren'. He gave it back."

"Now you give it to me."

"What for?"

"Because you can't have a knife in class."

"Says who?"

"I say so."

He handed me the knife.

"Don' forget, when you get me in trouble, that it ain' open. I don' trow no open knives."

The knife secured and the fine distinction made between throwing open and closed ones, the class returned to the affairs of Odysseus. But their scant interest in the classics

had flown, for a more interesting situation was at hand. The question was: whom was I to blame? The knife was not the culprit's; it belonged to a sweet-faced child across the room. It had been taken from him by one of the wrongdoer's cronies with the express intention of diverting my attention from the ventriloquism affair to a more serious disciplinary matter involving the possession of a knife. I spoke to the child as the class left and learned that the knife was his but that he would never have thought to show it, much less toss it across the room. The other two had taken it from him. He looked at me mutely, deeply flushed.

"I'm sorry, Miss Dunn."

I believed him, but the situation was no less disturbing. It was a case of word against word, and I had to break the impasse and do it to the complete satisfaction of these severest critics.

The main issue here was the pathos in the terrorization of the weak by the strong and the silent, confiding transfer of responsibility to the teacher as the one to defend the innocent. Many might not consider a situation like this important enough to warrant their untangling the various threads that make up the pattern, but I thought such action necessary, for adolescent years are not years of individual stands against the bully, the clown, the favorite. I, as teacher, must act for those who were victimized. I must show them that the big balloon could be deflated. Miss this opportunity or fail to see its implications, and I would be failing my students. The two boys finally admitted taking the knife and tossing it across the room.

I also met some rare examples of maturity and talent. There was one boy, a sixth-termer when I taught him, who combined both qualities to an amazing degree, and who

could express and defend his own ideas even though others in the class railed against him—more in jealousy, perhaps, than from conviction. The faculty spoke highly of him, but he was not popular with the kids at all because he did not conform; he was frequently seen in shirt and tie. The tragedy here is that this was a boy to be proud of, a boy with whom you would want your own children to associate, but we could no more have persuaded the student body that he was someone to emulate than we could have got Arthur to speak French. He knew this and adopted a waiting attitude, as if he understood their immaturity and was waiting for them to catch up. He used to say, "Excuse me," each time he passed in front of my desk, and for some time I could not figure it out. I thought he was talking to someone else. When it finally came to me that he was simply being polite in excusing himself because he was passing in front of me, I found it hard to believe. It was a little amenity, a niceness of bringing-up, that was even more outstanding when one considered the background of crudeness and noise against which it occurred.

I remember the modest girls who asked to work for you during their free periods or after school, or who told you shyly that you were wearing a nice dress or "cute" shoes. I remember the tough-looking boys, built like prize fighters, who occasionally carried my books to class and withstood in silence their pals' guffaws. Or the Negro boy on the football team who shook my hand at the end of the term, saying how much he had enjoyed being in my class. Or the girl who wrote to me that she appreciated what I had done for her when I tried to teach her to write a sentence. And I also remember the children I was wrong about, the children whose courage I mistook as callousness and whose justice

often seemed too complex to understand. I remember the humility that I mistook for dullness.

One of my clearest memories, however, is of the boy I taught in a senior English class, and who caused a great flurry of excitement during a debate on the question of deferring boys from the draft on the basis of their intelligence—the practice that was designed to allow them to finish college or graduate school before going into service, while those with less scholastic ability were taken straight from high school. Most of the children were vehemently against this new draft policy, but some of the bright ones who stood to benefit by it were understandably loud in its support. The boy of whom I speak was not one of those; he would not go to college. Nevertheless, he supported the measure, saying, "I don't care if the smart ones are not drafted. I'll go for them. They should be doctors and lawyers. We need them. I'm not so smart, so I'll take their place for a while."

There was neither bravado nor self-pity in his statement. He knew precisely what he was saying, had thought it over, had weighed it, had made up his mind, and expressed his opinion. The reaction of the class was ridicule. "I'll say you're not so smart" was one comment. They would not even hear him in silence and laughed at him before he was through. Here was an unselfishness that was too deep for them to absorb and I spent the balance of the period explaining it. I wanted them to realize that he was not indulging in theatrics for the sake of a higher mark, as they craftily suggested. I suggested that those for whom he was willing to be proxy might be the unworthy ones. There seemed to me to be more posturing on the part of those who joined the battle of the books for the glory of the Republic.

And did I never know the smart ones? Yes, I did, and I knew that many of the honor classes I taught were interesting and satisfying. They were children who were interested in poetry, like the brilliant boy who was greatly concerned over the idea of immortality in "Tears." He had never heard the word "immortality" before, and was staggered by its meaning—and its implications.

"I don't get it. Does she actually mean that something lives after the body dies? That everything doesn't die together? I can't believe it."

"You don't have to. You only have to believe that other people believe it."

"Where does she talk about immortality?"

"Nowhere. Not in so many words. But in poetry you have to infer, you have to listen with your heart as well as read with your head. Sometimes you just have to let it soak in first and think about it afterward. There. Read these lines again. First she remarks how short life is, and since it is so brief, 'I wonder at the idleness of tears.' What does she say next?"

"She talks to people who are dead."

"To whom? Be specific."

"Chieftains, bards, and keepers of the sheep."

"All right. You know what all those words mean?"

"I don't know 'bards.'"

"Poets, storytellers."

"Thanks."

"Now. What does she ask them to do for her?"

"She says:

"Loose me from tears, and make me see aright
How each hath back what once he stayed to weep:
Homer his sighr, David his little lad!"

We looked at each other in silence. I smiled at him: his perplexity was that genuine.

"It still doesn't reach you?"

"No."

"When else could Homer see again? He died blind. How can a father have a dead son restored to him except in a life that extends beyond a death of the body?"

"But, Miss Dunn, that's superstition, or at best a myth."

"Call it what you will. It's an idea, a belief, that's part of humanity. It always has been, and I think that it always will be."

"I still don't get it."

"Well, think about it, anyway. You're sure to meet it time and time again in your reading here and in college. What do you think you'll major in?"

"Science."

"Hm. Well, just don't get so lost in test tubes that you forget what animates a great part of your fellow men. You've got far too fine a mind for that."

"O.K. I'll ask my father about it. He's a teacher too."

"Fine."

"Thanks a lot, Miss Dunn."

"My pleasure."

I read their essays, their short stories, their verse. I saw ideas play over their intelligent faces and heard them report on books they had read—good books, books they had to work to get something out of. We worked together and enjoyed ourselves in the process. And while I hoped they learned from me, I certainly learned from them. I learned the stimulation and reward in working with an interested, wide-awake class.

Occasionally, I would have a student who took exception to nearly everything I said—"You can't say that," or

"That isn't true"—looking upon it as a term project to teach me politics, economics, social theory, or literary criticism. But while the honor classes were undoubtedly better classes to teach, I never felt that they were more satisfying in all respects. My preference was always for the average group, for it gave you a chance to reach the ones who really wanted to learn and needed guidance, no matter what their intellectual equipment might be. It gave the dull ones a glimpse of normalcy and kept the bright ones trimmed down to size. For how can a bad child become good if you surround him with others like himself? How can smart ones avoid prigishness unless they are made to realize that there are personal qualities as important as brains? How can average students see the value of trying harder unless they are exposed to both extremes, one partly the result of effort and the other partly of apathy?

Unfortunately, the good students were few and far between. The handshake, the offer to clean the blackboards, or the evidence of a basic willingness to learn came as rather strange interludes in a welter of indifference or hostility. And even though the earnest, likable children are to be found, the whole school system is geared to the problem child. He is petted, excused, and studied out of all proportion. He is the man of the hour, and he knows it; he is conscious of his nuisance value and uses it to the fullest. He is the center of the school, the basic unit with whom all must work. I think that many children made themselves problem children simply because they saw how important they could become, how much attention would be paid to them.

You may be indecisive in cataloguing your students, unwilling to put them in a "good" or "bad" category. They,

on the other hand, know your exact place and sooner or later make it known to you. I once requested a student to take off his coat while in class, and he answered precisely:

"You can ask me to take off my jacket, but you can't tell me to."

3. FROM DAY TO DAY

SO THAT was the background of my teaching job: the reasons why I wanted to teach, the ideas I had formed about it beforehand. And that was how I found my job in its externals, in its organization, its personnel, its children. This, now, was my actual job. This was a typical day.

The alarm went off at six thirty, its strong, impersonal bleat dragging me from a heavy sleep into another barely broken dawn. Feeling as if I had not slept at all, I closed my eyes again for one long, luxurious moment and then got up. I shuffled out to the kitchen, splashed water into the coffee pot, put the toaster on the table, and rattled out the dishes. My brother appeared soundlessly at the kitchen door, and we automatically took out positions, vantage points on the far side of the table from which we could stare out the window to watch the sun rise.

"Looks like a nice day."

"I beg your pardon."

"Nice day."

"Um."

I gathered up the dishes and stowed them in the sink, looked at the clock, put on coat, hat, and lipstick, and picked up bag, gloves, and—the badge of my profession—a big Manila envelope filled with corrected compositions. My brother, waiting for me at the elevator, smiled at the papers.

"More masterpieces?"

"Every one a pearl."

After a silent trip down, we went our separate ways. It was never crowded in the subway at seven thirty on a cold morning, particularly going toward Sheepshead Bay. There were construction workers employed at the projects being built in that vicinity, a lot of laundry workers, an occasional fisherman, and the teachers who staffed the schools in that remote corner of the metropolis. What category, I used to wonder, did my fellow passengers put me in? It usually took me about fifteen minutes to walk to the station from my house, and this morning it seemed even longer, for I was bucking an icy wind that whistled up the sleeves of my coat and cut at my face; it made me walk a little faster, shifting my pocketbook and awkward bundle of papers as I hastened down the long, deserted streets and waited impatiently on windy corners for the light to change. Stopping only a minute to buy the morning paper at the stand by the subway, I gratefully entered the narrow stone cave—at least it was warmer than the street. There was nobody else on the platform, so I settled myself, bags, paper, purse, and all, on the cold wooden bench and waited for the local to come lumbering in. I had just got the paper opened to the Korean War bulletins on page two when I had to gather everything up again and board the train, resettling a moment later in a corner seat. This train ran only two stops underground; after that, it tooled along on the street level through a comfortable residential section of big old wooden houses backed by yards and ponderous trees. This morning's sun was brilliant, now two inches above the horizon and shining straight through the dirty train windows into the trees by the side of the road. My paper was still folded neatly in my hand, waiting to be read, but I could not get away from

the sun. It entranced me. However, the spell was broken at the first express stop when a group of Negroes, about three men and four women, got on and congregated in a corner where they could sit facing one another. They entered laughing, their faces wreathed in smiles, and as they sat leaning toward each other, occasionally touching hands in their eagerness to communicate their joy, their laughter swelled and became infectious. They were, unknowingly, the center of attraction. They must have been discussing a mutual acquaintance, for all one could catch (and we were all of us trying) was the reiterated, "Wahn't he *funny*?" Each time it was said, the others choked on their memories, doubled up with their thoughts, and the sound of their rich laughter filled the car, making the rest of us feel good—so good that we even smiled at one another. They got off severally, still laughing, at various local stops, and one tall fellow, just as the door opened, laying a bank of brilliant sunlight on the floor, caught the tag end of someone's story, threw back his head, laughed one final exultant laugh, and then, since voice could express no more, resoundingly thwacked the pole in the center of the car with his rolled-up newspaper. We were almost all grinning now, to the intense annoyance of one wizened old man who sat staring straight ahead, his fists clasped between his bony knees, wailing monotonously, "Go ahead and laugh, all a' yez. Stupid. You laugh, but not one a' yez got what I got home. A berler, that's what I got, a berler."

The train was soon quiet again, rocking along in its steady rhythm of stop and start while squares of light made brief tattoos just in the curve of the roof. I rode nearly to the end of the line. Walking along the hollow wooden platform that was the Avenue Z station, I met a teacher friend who must have been farther back in the same train.

"Coffee?"

"Depends on the bus. Is there one coming?"

She shrugged. "Let's live a little."

We trailed down the stairs and into a steaming coffee shop.

"Two reg'lar," shouted the counterman as we heaved ourselves up on the stools, plunked bag and envelopes on the counter, looked at each other, and smiled.

"Cigarette?"

"Have my own, thanks."

"So what else is new?"

"It's Thursday, and we're over the hump."

"Thank God for small favors."

"Got your Regents schedule yet?"

"Yes. Two morning proctoring assignments and then correct papers for two days. How about you?"

"Just about the same, only I have to register incoming freshmen."

"You poor soul. That's bad news. Got your shin guards?"

"Shin guards is right. Did you ever see anything like that mess last term? I was on hall duty, walking around the first floor by the gym, when all of a sudden comes this tremendous toar, and a herd of them, not even belonging in the school yet, comes thundering down at me, screaming and yelling. I stopped one of them and asked him where they were racing to. Do you know what the answer was? They were looking for the soccer team. The soccer team! I thought they were going to stampede straight through the back wall into Carson Avenue."

"Ah, well. The eager little minds were just ardent for sport, that's all."

"Sport! It's bad enough having to fight with the ones that are already here, but why do we have to wrestle with the

"Coffee?"

"Depends on the bus. Is there one coming?"

She shrugged. "Let's live a little."

We trailed down the stairs and into a steaming coffee shop.

"Two reg'lar," shouted the counterman as we heaved ourselves up on the stools, plunked bag and envelopes on the counter, looked at each other, and smiled.

"Cigarette?"

"Have my own, thanks."

"So what else is new?"

"It's Thursday, and we're over the hump."

"Thank God for small favors."

"Got your Regents schedule yet?"

"Yes. Two morning proctoring assignments and then correct papers for two days. How about you?"

"Just about the same, only I have to register incoming freshmen."

"You poor soul. That's bad news. Got your shin guards?"

"Shin guards is right. Did you ever see anything like that mess last term? I was on hall duty, walking around the first floor by the gym, when all of a sudden comes this tremendous roar, and a herd of them, not even belonging in the school yet, comes thundering down at me, screaming and yelling. I stopped one of them and asked him where they were racing to. Do you know what the answer was? They were looking for the soccer team. The soccer team! I thought they were going to stampede straight through the back wall into Carson Avenue."

"Ah, well. The eager little minds were just ardent for sport, that's all."

"Sport! It's bad enough having to fight with the ones that are already here, but why do we have to wrestle with the

kids that don't even belong to us yet? What a way to end the term—fighting with next term's freshmen."

"They look like a bad bunch?"

"The ones I saw, yes. What will we do if they're all like that?"

"Just what we always do. Put up with it."

"Here comes the bus. Run."

The woman boarding the bus just ahead of me lumbered up the steps and peered near-sightedly at the driver.

"This bus goda Sixty-eight Street?"

"Lady, I on'y drive this thing, I don' make no predictions."

She put her money in the box and started down the aisle.

"I din't ask no prediction. I askta question. Why can'tcha be nice, ha?"

"Because I ain't."

The woman, clucking to herself and looking around the bus for an approving eye, settled heavily into a seat.

"Nothing like a fight to start the day."

"Bracing. What's in the paper?"

"Same old stories—trouble."

"Anybody giving us teachers a raise?"

"Dreamer!"

The bus careened along. Nobody got off; people just kept getting on. My friend and I had taken seats opposite each other, but now the aisle was so crowded that she was no longer visible. I decided to try the crossword puzzle but could not move my arm enough to extract a pencil from my purse. Many children on their way to school were traveling on the same bus, and I decided to forgo the puzzle entirely in favor of the conversation now going on over my head. Both girls wore long, belted, pastel kid jackets, mid-

"Coffee?"

"Depends on the bus. Is there one coming?"

She shrugged. "Let's live a little."

We trailed down the stairs and into a steaming coffee shop.

"Two reg'lar," shouted the counterwoman as we heaved ourselves up on the stools, plunked bag and envelopes on the counter, looked at each other, and smiled.

"Cigarette?"

"Have my own, thanks."

"So what else is new?"

"It's Thursday, and we're over the hump."

"Thank God for small favors."

"Got your Regents schedule yet?"

"Yes. Two morning proctoring assignments and then correct papers for two days. How about you?"

"Just about the same, only I have to register incoming freshmen."

"You poor soul. That's bad news. Got your shin guards?"

"Shin guards is right. Did you ever see anything like that mess last term? I was on hall duty, walking around the first floor by the gym, when all of a sudden comes this tremendous roar, and a herd of them, not even belonging in the school yet, comes thundering down at me, screaming and yelling. I stopped one of them and asked him where they were racing to. Do you know what the answer was? They were looking for the soccer team. The soccer team! I thought they were going to stampede straight through the back wall into Carson Avenue."

"Ah, well. The eager little minds were just ardent for sport, that's all."

"Spott! It's bad enough having to fight with the ones that are already here, but why do we have to wrestle with the

calf-length white-ribbed cotton socks, black loafers, and long, straight black skirts. They also wore elaborate, expertly applied make-up that must have taken at least thirty minutes to apply and did not disguise in the least the fact that they were no more than fourteen years old. They looked fixedly at each other from under beaded eyelashes as they chattered, punctuating their feelings of surprise, disgust, dismay, or elation with emphatic snaps of bubble gum.

"Where were ya laes night? I came over ya house and ya mother says ya gawn out awreddy."

"Yeah, I wen'."

"Whca ya go?"

"Over my aens'. I gotta watch huh baby while she go visit huh cousin inna hospital."

"Huh cousin sick?" (Snap.)

"Sure. She's sick fuh yeahs. She got TB."

"No foolin." (Snap.)

"Sure. My mother says don' go over yuh aens' if she goes to visit huh cousin, you might get sick, but I don't cack, I'll go anyway, my aen' gotta lotta work to do and besides the baby is soooo cute."

"Yeah?" (Snap.)

"Yeah. He's a doll."

"Better than Carmine?"

"Stupid. Who's better than Carmine?"

The bus tilted to a stop, and everyone got up at once, standing bent over the seats, waiting for the aisles to clear sufficiently to grant toe space toward the door. I spied my friend across the aisle and, catching her eye, tried hard not to smile. The girls were finishing their conversation on an academic note.

"Angie, ya pass ya English test?"

"Ya kiddin?"

"Ya fail?"

"Sure."

"Wadja get?"

"Twenty-six. That teach' don' like me."

They both laughed with real enjoyment, watching us. As we got off the bus, I said to my friend:

"These kids! What's a test to them? What do they care that we had to spend hours correcting them, after first spending hours deciphering them?"

"I don't understand why you bother to give tests at all. Just get ynursel a good project and mark that. It takes nearly all term to do and the kids think they're working hard and there's less work for mother. Be smart."

"You may be able to do that in your subject, but you really can't get away with it when you teach English."

"You can get away with anything."

"More than the kids?"

"Well. Not quite."

"You know, that's really my secret ambition."

"What is?"

"To get away with more than my students do."

"Don't be greedy. You were a student once yourself. You want to have all the fun?"

We were laughing as we pulled at the big brass doors that let us into the hall, still empty since it was still early. We punched our time cards, stuck them in the proper slots, and dragged a pile of notices, papers, and late slips out of our mailboxes.

"Smoke?"

"No. Me for my ivory tower. Have a vital day."

"Ha."

I decided not to chance the elevator. The operator, Pearl, was a woman of two moods: a resentful silence if

something went wrong (as when the custodian would not aid her ailing elevator, when he, according to Pearl, sat behind his closed door and "smoked mar-i-jew-ah-na") or a chatty volubility if all were well. Truly she was a good soul, for she kept her troubles to herself and engaged an alien ear only for good news, but in her eagerness to clue you in on her latest pleasure, she had been known to stop the elevator between floors and settle in for a good chat, and I did not want to lose any time. It was strange, but the minute you got in the building you began to rush; minutes, especially quiet minutes, became very important. I decided, therefore, to walk—up one flight and around to the other side of the building. There was an occasional student sitting on the floor in front of a classroom door, head buried in a book, but for the most part the halls were clear. I unlocked my classroom door, put papers, notices, late slips, purse, and gloves on the desk, walked to the back of the room, and unlocked my closet door. After hanging up my coat, I rolled up the shades, opened a rear window, picked up some stray papers from the floor, pried a piece of gum from the window sill, straightened the chairs, blew on the top of my desk, and looked around. I decided to wash the boards.

Rummaging in yet another closet, I came up with a mottled basin holding a desiccated eraser. As I carried them into the hall to get some water, I nearly bumped into one of my tough-looking prefect class students. Although it was cold out, freezing cold, he wore only a leather jacket over his black-and-white checked wool shirt.

"'Scuse me, Miss Dunn."

"That's all right. I wasn't looking where I was going either. What are you doing here so early?"

"I hadda come in for detention, so the teacher says we could leave early so I came up here."

"You mean it's too cold to go out on the stoop for a smoke."

He grinned.

"Well, now that you're here, why not make yourself useful? Want to wash the boards?"

"Sure. Gimme the stuff."

While he was busy with his watery task, I got out the day's attendance slip, put the roll book on the desk, filled my pen, placed new sticks of chalk on the blackboard sills, made sure my wooden pass was where it should be, and piled the textbooks I would use during the day on one side of my desk.

Rocco put the utensils back in the closet, went to his seat, slid down onto the base of his spine, and sprawled his legs out into the aisle.

"Tired so soon?"

"Na. I just hate to get up so oily."

"Then why not stay out of trouble?"

"I don't get inna no trouble, Miss Dunn. Um a goo' boy, you know that."

"Yes, I do, Rocco, but does the dean?"

"Sure he does. He's a nice guy."

"Then why are you serving detention all the time. For laughs?"

"That teacher don' like me."

"Oh, come on, Rocco. You're a big boy now. Take the blame yourself if you deserve it. What did you do, cut class again?"

"Yeah."

"What class?"

A pause. "English."

"Why is it always English?"

"I caen' staen' that class.

"And what do you do when you cut?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

"The weather."

"How come?"

"If it's a nice day, I go sit on the back stoop and meet my fren', we have a smoke. If it's a cold day, like today, we go to the cafeteria and get somethin' to eat. Sometimes we cut all day."

"So I've been told. And what do you do then?"

"Go to a show."

"Where?"

"New York. They got goo' pitchers there, Miss Dunn."

"Rocco, don't you know it's wrong to cut school? Don't you know that a lot of people go to a lot of trouble to give you an education? And all you think about it is to cut whenever you can. Don't you think that's wrong?"

"Na. It's boring. Why ya pick on me, Miss Dunn? I don't make no trouble for ya."

"I'm only trying to help you. Someday you may be sorry you wasted so much time here, and then you'll want to come back. They always do."

"Who does?"

"The people who cause all the trouble while they're here. They want out so badly they slug the teachers and then they want in so badly they forge records. Why?"

"I dunno."

"What do you plan to do with yourself, Rocco?"

"Ha?"

"I mean, when you get out of school? What do you want to do, or be?"

"I dunno."

"Maybe the school could do something to help you make up your mind, teach you something you could use to make a living."

"Na, not this school. This school is stupid."

"Did you ever think that it might be you and not the school that's stupid?"

He did not answer, just slunk a little lower into the chair.

"Well, no hard feelings, Rocco. I just think you're a good kid and I hate to see you get into so much trouble. Anyway, thanks for washing the board."

"Ya welcome, Miss Dunn."

While we had been talking, others had drifted in and the room was filling up. It was a "good" class, a group of fourth-term academic and commercial students, mainly, with a smattering of general students like my friend Rocco. They spoke to one another, gossiped, laughed, exchanged homework, or scrutinized the daily tabloid, which they read with a fine science: their interest fastened on page one, deepened on pages two and three, skipped to the centerfold, and then rested on the sports pages in the back. My prefect class had been assigned seats that corresponded to cards in a folder; taking attendance was therefore a matter of turning over the card where a seat was vacant and ticking off the date on the reverse side. It was apparent from a glance around the room that only one or two were missing, but I delayed sending the attendance down to the office for one reason. My problem, my character, my prefect class "challenge," had not yet arrived; there were still a few minutes to go before she would be technically late. I knew where she was. She was in the stairwell of the flight of stairs just behind the classroom where she held daily court for a small group of avid, slack-jawed girls who listened wide-eyed to her obscenities

and dirty jokes. Nina, in addition to her heavy duties as curator of the school pornography, was a first-class equivocator. If I marked her absent, she shouted at me that she was not absent, she had been in the hall. Then followed a long, involved argument that ended with my requesting her to come into the room so that it would be official. One never, never raised one's voice to Nina. To do so would be an invitation to a fight in which her weapon was a masterly vulgarity. I never got upset if Nina shouted at me. That was her ordinary tone of address. The time to worry was when she lowered her voice—the prelude to a select bit of filth.

I began taking the attendance just as she opened the door and swung around on her toes to close it elaborately. She began to mince across the room. I had her sitting directly in front of my desk, something she resented violently. To punish me for doing this to her, she usually contrived a theatrical entrance, and she invariably got the attention she desired. She was a stout girl, heavy on her feet. She wore loads of bracelets, hoop earrings, a full skirt, and a tight sweater. Her face was stiff with make-up; the only mobile things in it were her eyes, which held "the rich glint of lunacy."

She stopped just before coming into my field of vision, and I knew by the class's reaction that she was mimicking me—and probably doing a good job of it, too. I ignored her. She could be just as bad when she was kittenish as when she was angry. The only time her behavior approached normalcy was when she was puzzled about something and just glowered. If she were seriously upset, she simply did not bother to come to school at all. I think this was a result of her belief that nothing serious should be countenanced in school, it was a place to have a good time

in. I finished calling the roll (she curtsied mockingly when I called her name) and turned to face her.

"Sit down, please, Nina."

"Yes, Miss Dunn," she simpered back, in a wide burlesque of the classic intonation little children use when answering their teacher.

Immediately after she had seated herself, the front door opened and a well-scrubbed, bright little boy of thirteen or so stepped up to my desk and asked:

"Can I talk to the class?"

"At your own risk."

I banged on the desk with my eighteen-inch ruler.

"Quiet, please."

"My name is Neal Spivak and I'm running for fourth-term grade rep. Do you want a clean cafeteria? Wouldn't you like a swimming pool? And how about—"

Suddenly, the back door slammed open to admit a ginger-colored mongrel with a violently wagging tail, who trotted down the side aisle to the accompaniment of a lunatic whoop of laughter from the boy standing just outside the door. I stood up.

"Ger that dog out of here."

I strode to the front door. Nina was also on her feet.

"Vinny," she shrieked and then broke into uncontrollable laughter.

"...and clean uniforms for the soccer team...."

Young Spivak, campaigning still, deftly side-stepped me as I made for the door. When I got out into the hall, Vinny was nowhere in sight. Only his shouts hung in the air.

The class was in an uproar. The dog was racing up and down the aisles and someone was calling, "Here, Vinny. Here, boy," while Nina, sitting on her desk with her feet on her chair, surveyed the scene delightedly.

I re-entered the room by the back door, and shut it and then the front one.

"Quiet," I shouted. "Sam, get that dog and take him out the side door. Get down from your desk, Nina. Stop that. . . ."

"Can I finish my speech?"

"Another day, Spivak, please."

He turned to go, reluctantly. The P.A. switched on. "Will the owner of the blue Chevrolet, license number KL625803, remove same immediately from in front of the school. The pie wagon cannot unload. Thank you."

"Just vote for me on January twelfth. Remember, no looking back with Spi-vak."

A voice floated from the back of the room, "Relax, kid, ya got it made."

"Nina, get off that desk."

"Awright, awright. Gimme time."

The P.A. again.

"At-ten-shun. All rise for the pledge to the flag."

"All right. Everybody up. I pledge. . . ."

"Get up, Nina."

"Damn it, ya just tol' me ta sit down."

"I know, but that was before. Just get up now."

"... of the United States. . . ."

The door opened.

"Mr. Goldberg wants George Lee."

Rocco queried, "Why?"

"Listen, you pay attention to what you're supposed to be doing. . . ."

"There's no George Lee in this class."

"Mr. Goldberg told me he's here."

"Well, I don't want to destroy your faith in Mr. Goldberg, but he's not here."

"Sit down, please, gentlemen."

In this first word to the class, just as in all subsequent words, there was no sarcasm in my voice. I spoke to them formally, brightly, coaxingly, as if they were children to be enticed into entering an exciting adult world. It was only through the use of an idiom completely unknown to them, delivered in a calm, soft voice, that the barest control could be exercised; when I yelled, they knew I was truly angry. I spoke my language to them. They spoke theirs to me.

"In a minute, ha?"

"Now."

"Um talkina my fren'. Whatsa harm, ha?"

"None, just sit down."

The principal speaker sighed elaborately and turned to dismiss his cronies: "See yez later." The group dispersed, walking slowly and emphatically on cleated soles to their seats.

"Quiet, please. Take out your notebooks and put them on the desk. Take out your pens as well. We're going to have a little vocabulary drill today."

Not a movement was made. Louis was the only one in the class who carried a book, and his was already on the desk. This was all part of the game we played, E62G and I. We pretended to be teacher and students; everyone in the class was a serious disciplinary problem and would tolerate teachers only if they spoke softly and demanded nothing.

I pointed to the word at the top of the list.

"Can anyone pronounce this word?"

The boy in the last seat in the second row stretched his arms above his head, yawned deeply, closed his eyes, and sank back upon his spine.

"Does anyone know what the word means?"

One boy hissed at another, "Wha'time?" and got the leisurely answer, "Nine oh tree. Half hour to go." The questioner started tapping on his desk with a key.

"Stop the noise, Medina."

Medina exhaled loudly.

"Does anyone *care* what the word means?"

Louis grinned.

"Do you care, Marvin?"

"Wa?"

"Get your head off the desk and maybe you'll hear something."

"Ha?"

"Wake up, Marvin, and tell me what you think about the word up there. Are you awake?"

"Yeah."

"All right. What about the word?"

"Whea?"

"There."

"*That woid?*"

"*That woid.*"

"Nuttin!"

"That isn't the word."

"Yeah. I know. That's what I tink."

There was loud, exaggerated laughter. Marvin, pleased, rubbed sleep out of his eyes.

"Well, now, we're on the right track. You're thinking. Now think about that word—that one."

"O.K."

"Good man."

"I can't say it."

"Do you want me to say it for you?"

"Yeah."

"Yes, Miss Dunn?"

"Yes, Mrs. Dunn."

"*Ex-quisite.*"

He continued to stare at the board uncomprehendingly.

"*Ex-quisite, Marvin.*"

"Oh."

"Yes."

A pause.

"*Ya sure?*"

I laughed. "Yes, I'm sure."

Another pause.

"*Exquisite.*" A long silence. "Dat's da ting ya put fires out wit'," he announced with *finality*.

They howled. Someone yelled, "Sure, a fire *exquisite* like dey got in da hall. What a jerk!"

"Don't be so quick to comment, O'Rourke. He tried harder than you did."

"He's stupid."

"He might say the same thing about you someday."

"Let him try. I'll *drop* him."

"While you're waiting, why not try the next word."

"Na, I don' know it."

Marvin had gone to sleep again, and O'Rourke had gone sullen. He resumed his pencil-tapping.

"And put that pencil down."

He slammed it on the desk.

We glared at one another as I walked to the front window and pushed it open. I stayed there, at the side of the room, for it occasionally calmed them down if they did not see a teacher in front of them.

"Come on now, wake up, all of you. Pay attention. Shumacher, take the next word."

"I caen' see da woid."

"Turn around and look at the board. It's not out the window."

"I caen read ya writin."

"Stop stalling Shumacher. You can read a comic book at forty paces. Spell it out."

"Ac-c-om-pli-sh. Uhcomplish."

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Know what it means?"

"No."

"I'll use it in a sentence for you. 'The tired worker could not accomplish his task.' It's a verb."

"So what?"

"Do you know what a verb is, Schumacher?"

"No."

"It shows action," Louis sang out.

"Listen to the fruit," said O'Rourke viciously.

"And I'm sick of listening to you and your language, O'Rourke. One more word out of you, just *one more word*, and I'll get you into more trouble than you've ever seen before. Understand?"

He muttered something under his breath and sank lower in the seat.

"I asked you a question. Do you understand how I want you to behave in here, O'Rourke?"

"Yeah."

"Yes, Miss Dunn."

"Yes, Miss Dunn."

"Now, look, Anthony. Pay attention to me. If the man is tired, he cannot work as hard as he could if he were not tired. He can't accomplish what he sets out to do. What is a word meaning the same thing as accomplish?"

"Woik?"

"Well, not quite. It's nearer the idea of trying to complete something, to finish it."

"Stupid. Why do we hafta learn big woids? Whyncha say 'do'? Means the same thing."

"Not quite."

"So who cares? I say a woid like dat an all my fren's laugh at me. *Nobody* know what dat woid means."

"I do."

"You're a teacher."

"Too true. But I know more than that. I know, for instance, that Mr. Santangelo at the rear of the room has a comic book under the desk and is trying to read it. Pay attention here, August. English is a fascinating study."

"Ha?"

"Never mind. Just put the jokes away."

"Hey, Miss Dunn. I know whatta woid mean. Accomplish is a thing tha tells ya the direction when ya lost inna woods."

Marvin had not slept at all, it now appears, but had sprawled there all this while, hunched over his desk, still thinking. In attempting to repeat his victory of earlier in the period, he had been successful beyond his wildest imaginings. Heads were flung back, feet stamped on the floor, and that was the end of the vocabulary drill. Too little interest had turned into too much.

I had planned to read for the second half of the period. A quick glance at the clock (I could see it through the glass pane in the back door) told me that there were fifteen minutes left in the period, and for a moment I did not know if it were worth the effort to begin. But then, if not that, what? The mayhem could not continue.

"Sam and Ira. Give out the books please."

"Oh, no."

"Oh, yes. Come on. On the double."

"Yes, sir, Captain Dunn, sir."

"Less comedy and more action, Ira."

He got up and walked to the back of the room, trailing his fingers along the desks as he went.

"All right, now. Calm down, gentlemen."

But the restlessness that was concentrated in separate parts of the room, the boredom and the indifference obvious in individuals, had coalesced during the sportive vocabulary drill. As far as work was concerned, the period was already over. But they had to do something; if it turned out to be something constructive, so much to the good. My two monitors were gleefully tossing books on desks.

"Hey, Louie, catch."

"Don' trow school property, stupid."

"Ya caen' read anyhow."

"I might loin some day."

"Shut up."

"Quiet, please."

"Yeah, stupid, yabotherna teacher. Ain he a joik, Miss Dunn?"

It was about 9:15 A.M., and I was already weary. Banging the ruler on the desk a few times, I continued to call for quiet. Called for and did not get. I picked up my copy of the book, opened it to the right place, and stood, waiting. Finally, everyone had a book placed before him on the desk.

"Open to page 104."

"Do we *hafta* read this?"

"Yes. Page 104."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"*Why* do we *hafta* read this?"

"Because I say so."

For the rest of the period, I read to them from a book called *Son of the Middle Border*, an ornately written, detailed story of life on a Midwestern farm during the Civil War period. Most of the class considered the hero a "creep." The rest were not aware that there was a book being read.

The bell finally rang. For the first time, they were all looking at me, expectantly.

"All right. Pass the books to the back of the room and go."

They got up in one noisy bloc and made for the doors.

Quietly but expectantly, singly and in groups, the next class came filing in. This was the high spot of my teaching day, a seventh-term honor class, and it sometimes troubled me that they followed 62G. The shift from one extreme to the other in so short a time was sometimes more than I could take. It worried me that I could not, or did not, always teach this class the way it should be taught. I erased the words from the board and wrote a homework assignment in its place. As I was doing so, one of my students spoke to me.

"Miss Dunn, what's the name of that Italian movie?"

"Which one?"

"The one about the slums in Italy. You know, the one where they fly away on a broom."

"Oh, yes. *Miracle in Milan*."

"That's it. You like it?"

"Yes. Very much."

"Me too." He went to his seat and I turned to face the class. It was rather large for an honor group—thirty-five or so. I was glad to see them.

"Miss Dunn, Charlton Heston is going to be on TV in *Macbeth*."

"So I see in the paper. Do you have a TV set?"

"Yes, we do."

"Will you watch it then, please, and tell us how it was?"

"Yes, I'll be glad to."

"Anyone else plan to watch?"

A few hands went up.

"Good. Let's have a symposium. Leffler, I know you're a bit of an actor. Why don't you prepare a list of questions from your text? Fine. When is the program on? Tuesday? We'll take fifteen or twenty minutes from Wednesday's lesson. Don't forget your final test a week from tomorrow. Yes, Sandra?"

"What will be on the test?"

"Questions." We both smiled.

"On *Macbeth*?"

"Yes. Any more questions? Lewisohn?"

"Let's talk about U.M.T." Laughter. Lewisohn was the class politician.

"No. Let's talk about *Macbeth*. Open your books to page forty-two and we'll use the text for referral. I want you to do the talking today. But let's try to keep to the topic. Harriet, suppose you give us a brief review on the assignment and then begin the discussion yourself."

"Well, you told us to read this act for homework and to be prepared to explain it. Well, I read it, but I don't understand it."

"Well, give us your impression, opinion, anything. You can't stop there."

"Macbeth is talking here about a jewel, but he doesn't really mean a jewel, I don't think. Does he?"

"No, he doesn't. You're right there. He's greatly concerned over one thing but he talks about it in terms of another. What is that device called?"

"Symbolism." This came from a quiet, deep-eyed boy at the back of the room.

"Right, Greenfield. Can you give Harriet a more obvious example of it than the one in the play."

"My love is like a red, red rose."

"Excellent."

Heads were craned around and turned sideways toward Greenfield, who blushed.

"Want to try again, Harriet?"

"Does he mean his life?"

"Nor just his life, Nor quite. He's bothered by the loss of something very precious to him, something of great value."

"His draft card," called out Lewisohn.

No one in the class paid any attention to this crack. I looked at him and raised my eyebrows. The lesson proceeded.

"His crown? In a symbolic way? He mentions jewels."

"No. You haven't hit it yet. You're stuck on the symbols here. Listen to what some of the others have to say."

Many hands were raised; faces wore reflective expressions.

"Here's a hint. Think about the adjective describing the jewel. *Barbarett*?"

"Eternal. But how can a stone be eternal?"

"Exactly. Define eternal."

"Always, for good, everlasting."

"The last is the best. All right, remember the symbolism now, Tony. What field of interest, what idea, what people are concerned with words like eternal, eternity, everlasting?"

At that instant, the back door opened quietly, and a spectacled head was thrust in. It smiled brightly at me

(it was the head of another teacher in the English department), vanished for an instant, and then reappeared briefly at the end of a procession of even stranger, similarly brightly smiling faces attached to bodies that filed into the classroom, took seats, fussed with papers and pencils, while the faces looked around and took everything in. Great God, I thought, an observation. The relaxation, the enjoyment, the interest I took in this class and this lesson were usurped by an all-too-familiar feeling of tension and nervous awareness. Why did they have to come just as the class was beginning to get the point of the lesson? Would I be able to finish the lesson now before the bell rang? Did I have the homework assignment on the board? Yes. Well. Were there scraps of paper on the floor? Yes. Oh, well. The back window was still open too. Maybe they'd catch cold. Serve them right. Who were they? I had been leaning against my desk before they came in. Now, unconsciously, I stiffened. I could hear that slightly strained note come into my voice.

"Well, Tony?"

"I don't know. Macbeth does an awful lot of fighting but he sure doesn't sound like a soldier." Laughter.

Frivolity, I thought. What will they think?

"Come on, now." I was becoming unnecessarily strict. "Let's think. The question is still a question. What realm are we in here?—and don't tell me Scotland. Yes, Sanford."

"I think he's talking about his soul. He says here 'the common enemy of man.' That's the devil, I guess. But he's not talking from the best motives, I don't think."

"Why do you say that?"

"He's really more worried about who's going to be king than about his own soul."

"Good observation. Does anyone disagree with Sanford's interpretation?"

"I agree with him. His feeling is imperfect. He's more upset about Banquo's family being kings than he is about losing his soul, although—"

"There's no such thing as a soul."

"Lewisohn, don't interrupt. If you want to talk, raise your hand. You through, Tony?"

"Yes, I'm finished." Laughter.

"All right, Lewisohn."

"There's no such thing as a soul. No doctor has ever dissected a body and found a soul."

"You're right. But that doesn't prevent people from believing in it."

"I know. I just thought I'd mention it."

"All right. It's established that Macbeth is concerned over the loss of his soul. Why?"

"He believes in it, and so it's a serious loss."

"Comparable to what, if one does not believe in the existence of the soul?"

"Your life?"

"No, that's the same for everyone. What, then, if not life?"

"Health?"

"Not precisely. That's too much like life."

"Money?"

"You have the soul of a businessman, my friend. That answer is nowhere."

"Reputation?"

"Yes, but there's a better term. A stronger word. Selma?"

"Honor?"

"Good girl. You've got it."

The questions and answers now were coming fast, mov-

ing from one end of the room to the other. There were only ten minutes left. The point still had to be made. The observation was unexpected, and although such things no longer upset me in the way they once had, they still caused (and would always cause) my attention to be divided over an infinity of petty considerations when it should have been concentrated on the matter at hand. The realization that my lipstick was undoubtedly worn off engaged my attention for that split second between questions when allusions tease the mind. And these are the ideas, the inferences, the interrelationships that, when acted upon, really teach students what you want to teach them, and that when well acted upon, can be unforgettable. I felt the lesson was going badly—or at any rate, not as I had planned it.

"All right. Macbeth has lost his soul, has traded it to the devil in return for the crown. What form did the barter take?"

"He did something wrong. He murdered for it."

"Right. And if honor may for our purposes be considered synonymous with soul, paraphrase his remarks to apply to today's world."

"Well, if a man or a woman lost their honor, they wouldn't be as good as they were before. I mean, they couldn't be trusted as much."

"That's right, but that is more an interpretation than it is a paraphrase. What I want now is Macbeth's idea put into modern speech and in a modern situation."

"I'll try. Suppose a man said, 'I am deceived because I have lost my honor by doing something wrong by compromising, say, and now I find that the thing I thought I was going to get by this compromise is being given to someone else and so I am left with no honor and with no results of my dishonor.'"

"Excellent. One more thing, now." (I was racing against time.) "Does this concern with honor apply to all of us, would you think?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because we are all responsible for ourselves."

"Good. Then, in whom, or in what situations, is the loss of honor applied to others?"

"When the one losing honor has control over others."

"Why is its loss so serious then?"

"Because other ones, innocent ones, might be influenced to do evil as a result of the leader's loss of honor."

"Need I mention the fact that the world today is influenced or has been influenced for evil by men who have lost their sense of honor, and after that other things, even their sense of decency? Honor and other things of the spirit are important to man. Without them he cannot live as a man. Remember that. In the words of Macbeth, but in a different sense, 'Lay it to thy heart.' We have a split second before the bell rings. You have your assignment for tomorrow. Bring your books as usual. Can anyone give me a quotation using the word honor as we have been using it here this morning? Hamar?"

"Oh, I can't think of it. You know the one, Miss Dunn, the one about going to the wars."

"I could not love thee half so much, loved I not honor more.' Good."

"You're gonna hate me for this, Miss Dunn."

"Not today, Lewisohn. What is it?"

"There's honor among thieves."

The bell had rung in the middle of his sentence and when its sound faded we were all laughing—even, I noticed, the people in the rear. During the last ten minutes of the

class, I had forgotten that they were there. Now, as the children filed out, talking and laughing together, I saw the little band of observers advance toward me. I took off my glasses and rubbed my eyes. I smiled at them. One, obviously the spokesman, glanced at a card in her hand and spoke.

"Miss Dunn, that's your name, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And what kind of a class is this, Miss Dunn? I mean, are they freshmen or what?"

"No. They are all senior-class students, the first half of senior year, seventh term. It is an honor class. That means that each student in this class has been specially programed into this class because he is of superior intelligence."

"How interesting. Why is that done, Miss Dunn?"

"It's done in order to give the superior students a richer curriculum than is possible in an ordinary class, and also to allow them to progress faster than an ungraded class."

Another one of the group spoke to me, and I was surprised to find that she had a decided English accent. For a moment, I was startled by the fact that an Englishwoman was sitting in the rear of a classroom in Brooklyn listening to a bunch of American teen-agers talk about Shakespeare.

"And do you approve of this grading, Miss Dunn?"

"Not always."

"But this is such a fine group."

"Yes, but they are good-natured in addition to being intelligent. You sometimes get a class of honor students who are so impressed with themselves that they get tongue-tied."

"And does this grading work on the lower intelligence level as well?"

"Yes, it does."

"How very interesting. Miss Dunn, thank you so much

for letting us listen to your lesson. We enjoyed it immensely. Good luck and thanks again."

"Good-by. I'm glad you enjoyed your forty minutes here. It isn't always this good."

I dropped into my chair to try and collect myself a bit before the next class started, and found myself thinking about the observers. I still did not know who they were and why they were in my classroom. For all I knew, they might have been three women who were wandering in front of the school and suddenly decided, "Let's do drop in." But, no, Mr. Fessler showed them in; that meant that they had official sanction at any rate. It's a good thing they did not arrive for E62G. I smiled wryly—that had never happened; not many visitors were taken to see the other side of the garden.

"Whatcha laffin' at, Miss Dunn?"

"Private joke, Schlemowitz. You wouldn't understand."

"Sure, I would. Tell me."

The next class to come in was a younger group—forty or so cute little freshmen who usually scooted up and down the aisles like so many rabbits and then scooted directly to their seats the very minute the bell rang. They liked to act high-schoolish; they wanted to show that they were indifferent to rules—for as long as they could legally do so, as long as the teacher was not antagonized. They were very sweet, very obvious, and they were studying the *Odyssey*. They did not chat with me as easily (or as rudely) as the older ones because they were still new enough in high school to be impressed with it. As soon as the bell rang and the rabbits had scurried to their places, I stood up. I did not smile right away, for they liked me to take them seriously. Most of them did not have the foggiest idea what the *Odyssey* was all about, but they meant well.

"If you will open your books to the beginning of chapter seven, we will continue the description of our hero's journey through the underworld. Gentlemen, kindly stop punching one another. Sally, take that gum out of your mouth and throw it away."

"Do I hafta?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Ryder doesn't care if I chew gum."

"Well, I do. Throw it away."

There were a few "repeaters" in the class—a couple of boys and a girl who had proceeded doubtfully to senior year in high school without making up failed English classes. They slouched, bored, in their seats, making disgusted faces at the rest of the class and laughing derisively at them and their questions.

"Fred, tell us, if you will, in six or seven well-chosen sentences, what Odysseus has been up to on this trip through Hades."

"Well, he seen—"

"Saw."

"... he saw this here prophet, what's his name..."

"Tiresias."

"Yeah, he seen this here Tiresias, and this guy digs a hole in the ground and he makes Odyssey—"

"Odysseus."

"Yeah, he makes Odysseus go under the hole and go into this here big cave where all these here people are being punished."

"Fine. Sandra, have you anything to add?"

"No."

"Well, that's final."

"Ya aksed me, so I tol'

"Asked, my dear. Axing is a far more serious business than asking."

"Miss Dunn."

"Yes, Santoro?"

"He forgot something."

"What did he forget?"

"He forgot the part about the blood on the ground. Tiresias made him put blood on the ground before he let him go wit' him into the cave."

"Right you are. And why did Odysseus have to do that?"

"I dunno."

"Marylou?"

"Because it was the custom. If he didn't pour the blood, the ghosts would not appear to him."

"Not quite. *He* would not be visible to the *ghosts*. Say 'didn't.'"

"Didn't."

"Yes, remember that. You just mispronounced it."

One of the languid seniors shifted her graceless position and spoke.

"It's disgusting."

"What's disgusting, Amelia?"

"This book. Who ever heard of putting blood on the floor. It's disgusting."

"Do you read the daily paper?"

"Yeah. Sometimes."

"Well?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Doesn't that sometimes disgust you?"

"No. That's different. *That's real.*"

"That's a fine distinction. Seligfeld, will you read aloud please for a little while? Page forty-seven, at the top of the page."

He tripped and stumbled over his words, and I could see the bored looks on the faces around him. The class began to fidget and fuss and were soon mouthing the words themselves with the frustrated urgency of the passenger in a car who thinks the driver is going too fast and tries to press down on an imaginary brake. True, he was an awkward reader, but he loved to read aloud and the satisfaction on his face when he was through was good to see.

"Od-Odi..."

"Odysseus."

"Odysseus passed t'rough—"

"Through."

"da—"

"The, Seligfeld. Look at me, dear. When you want to make that sound, put your tongue between your teeth and blow behind it. Try it."

"Th-h-h."

"Say, they."

"They."

"All right, now. Say, 'through the gloomy...'"

"Passed t'rough, *through* the gloomy—"

"Good. Very good."

"Do you want me to go on, Miss Dunn?"

"Of course, continue."

"Passed through the gloomy regions of da, *the* underworld—"

"Ha. Underworld."

"What's your problem, Stigler?"

"Nuttin. Whaddya mean, problem? It's funny, that's all. Underworld. Maybe he meets the mob there, ha?"

Stigler had looked up from his nail-filing only long enough to make this comment, but it was sufficient to introduce a familiar note that had been missing so far this

morning in this class—an expressed indifference to what the teacher was trying to do. The ones who before had been content to be quietly bored were now whispering, making faces, writing notes on dirty scraps of paper, and putting on mournful expressions when they found me looking at them. As Seligfeld continued and sometimes looked at me expectantly for the pronunciation of a word, he found my attention elsewhere—trying to keep within my field of vision Amelia drawing arcs of purplish lipstick on her mouth, Stigler aiming his nail file at the floor, thrusting it downward with such force that his leather jacket creaked with the effort, watching it quiver on its tip, and then gazing up at me slyly from under his brows to see if I was going to say anything about it, and Mockler, leaning completely sideways out of his chair, drawing or writing something on the floor with a piece of chalk he had taken from the ledge of the side blackboard. I was also aware of some of the freshmen's attention wandering from the text, and could hear Seligfeld's voice tripping on through it all.

"Shirley, pay attention to the book. You, too, Alfred."

"Miss Dunn, we gotta read this book?"

"Yes, we do."

"Why?"

"Because it's a good story and a story you should know about if you want to be educated."

"That's what I mean, Miss Dunn. If they gimme a book I like in this school, I read it. If I hadda good book two years ago, I wouldna failed English. But they gimme a book like this. How can anyone read a book like this?"

"Well, Stigler, I'm afraid that if you don't read this one now, you're not going to pass this class either."

"Not me, I ain' gonna fail English again."

"You're sure you don't mean *still*?"

"I'm sure, boy. I ain' gonna fail. Am I?"

"It certainly looks that way now."

"Oh, no. You caen' do dis to me."

"All right, Marta, you read, dear, to the end of the page."

As she continued with the narrative, I made a quick shift in the lesson plan. The story was not going well, so I would have to spend the remainder of the period in another way. A little sentence work might fit in nicely. While Marta continued to read, I got out a grammar textbook, opened it to the sentence-structure drill, and signed for one of the girls to write four of the sentences on the board. This diverted the idlers; they always watched someone else writing as if they had never seen the performance before. And most of them mouthed the words intently as they were put down. Marta finished reading, and I called on an eager boy in the front seat for a summary of what had been read.

"Odysseus went down into the underworld and saw a lot of people being punished for things like one man who had to push a big stone up the hill and when he got it up there it rolled down again and another man who had to stand in the water and reach for fruit on a tree but he never got it."

"Good."

"Miss Dunn. He forget something."

"What?"

"The guy's name. Sisyphus."

"Ha. Sissyfoot. That's you, stupid."

I spoke quickly.

"Thanks, Barry. Close your books now, and you don't have to bring them tomorrow. Tomorrow you report on the books you have read for this third. Remember, I re-

minded you of it last week and also the day before yesterday."

"What book? We gotta read a book?"

"You know you have to, Stigler. I, for one, am getting fed up with you. You sit here *day after day* and *do nothing* but upset the class. You do no work and you try to make fun of anyone who does. I'm getting sick and tired of your comments. All you want to do is make an impression and believe me, you have, only it's not a very good one. One more remark out of you and I'll have you excluded until your mother comes to school. And you know what that means. You fail this class and you don't graduate. And don't think for one minute that I won't fail you if you deserve to fail. Now take that toothpick out of your mouth, sit up straight in the chair, and keep quiet. All right, class, look over to the side board, please. Here are four sentences, all of which are wrong for one reason or another. I want you to look them over for a minute and then I'll call on you for the answers."

While they pondered the sentences on the board, I walked up to Mockler, still hanging sideways out of the chair, his arm working busily.

"And whar are you doing, Rembrandt?"

He glanced up at me, his face flushed from the blood that had been running into it for so long.

"Don' look at me that way, Miss Dunn."

"What way?"

"Out of the corner of your eye."

I had to turn aside myself for a moment to keep from laughing. One sign of levity from me and the rest of the period would be chaos. Mockler had spent the entire forty minutes in this room sketching a flamboyant picture of a cowboy in full round-up regalia, seated upon a bronco.

"Sanford, tell us about the first sentence. What's wrong with it?"

"It's not right."

"I know. But how would you make it right?"

"Put a period after 'face.'"

"Right. How else could it be corrected, Armand?"

"Put a—you know, the thing with the period in it—after 'face.'"

"What is the thing with the period? Sam?"

"A semicolon."

"Right. Why is that correct too?"

"Because it has the same value as a period."

"When?"

"Between clauses that are equal in value."

"Good. Sam, you do my tired old teacher's heart good."

"Ah, you ain't so old, Miss Dunn."

That did it. Luckily, the bell rang just as I threw back my head to laugh. "We'll finish these sentences tomorrow. You may go."

As they surged toward the door, scurrying again, Mockler gave me a quizzical look.

"Ya don' like my drawin'?"

"I didn't say I didn't like it, Mockler. This just isn't the place to draw—particularly on the floor."

He was hurt.

As the last skirt disappeared around the corner of the door, I fell into my chair and buried my face in my hands. For a long moment, I was conscious of only nothingness while my head swirled. Then I got up quickly, erased the writing on the blackboards, gathered up stray bits of chalk, locked my desk and both doors of the room, and walked rapidly to the ladies' room where I just as hurriedly washed up and combed my hair. For this was lunch hour—about

forty minutes, at least ten of which were consumed just trying to get to the cafeteria in the basement.

In the elevator, I spied a friend almost buried in the back by a clutch of bandaged football players temporarily allowed to use the elevator by virtue of their wounds. They were in a particularly expansive mood because of this sought-after privilege and were pushing one another and guffawing in grand fashion.

The machine gained the basement, and we surged out. I waited for Yvonne.

"Without further ado, do you know a kid named Stigler?"

"Senior? Tall? Leather jacket? I think he was in my study group last term. Why? Giving you trouble?"

"Not really. He just happens to be on my nerves today."

"Nerves? At your age?"

"Listen, I've got nerves I haven't used yet."

"I know. It's an occupational hazard. But cheer up. In thirty-two years, you can retire."

"That used to be funny. Now it's just frightening."

By this time, we had got inside the cafeteria and were standing on line, tray in hand. There was always a jam at this point. People on line were always trying to substitute one vegetable for another on the "special" luncheon. Teachers behind us in the line were continually trying to dart ahead, muttering things like, "I only want a Jello," or "Just buttermilk for me, please. I'm in a hurry."

Yvonne gave a little yelp as she was pushed unexpectedly forward. One of the men on the faculty, in grabbing his tray, had jabbed her right in the small of the back.

"He never fails, does he?"

"That's because he doesn't really want to."

There was no thrill in selecting lunch; the menu rarely changed, and I had already scooped up a badly wrapped ham and cheese on rye. We inched along, having fallen into a reflective, staring silence. We collected our hardware and moved to the far right-hand corner, our usual retreat. We pushed two tables together, laid the places, and waited for the others to join us. John Stanton, another English teacher, came up to the table, set down his tray, and bowed deeply.

"Ah, ladies, how nice to see you."

"Likewise, I'm sure."

"Sit here, John. There's room to pull the chair around."

"Is there room for me here? You look like you expect a delegation."

"And you're one, Tony. How could we resist your smiling face?"

"Flattery will get you nowhere. Not that I haven't been in some unflattering situations."

"Room for me?"

"Sure. Climb aboard."

I looked up to see one of the gym teachers heading our way and smiled in anticipation. He was a wonderful fellow with an outrageous accent and a deep, galloping laugh.

"Push over, John, and let a member of a minority group join you."

"A pleasure, Sol."

Sol had caught the tag end of Tony's remark and as he set down his custard and his cup of coffee (with the spoon sticking straight up, imbedded in sugar), he looked up the length of the tables at Tony, deep in conversation with Miss Langsam (history department). Our luncheon group had grown and was too large for general conversation. I was glad to be seated near Sol and John. Sol looked impish,

and John watched him closely, his eyes kindling, his lips pursed.

"Tony."

"Mr. Goldman."

"Whatsa new?"

"Not a thing, Sol. At least, nothing I'd tell you."

He looked at him sideways.

"You were speakin' about unflat'rin' situations."

Someone else chimed in, killing any chance we at the other end of the table had of hearing any story from Tony prompted by Sol's remark.

"Well, if it's unflattering, it's sure to be seen. You always seem to meet one of the kids when you're looking awful, just running out to the store with your hair up in curlers or something like that."

"Or when you're all dressed up," I added, "and they can't figure out who you are..You're not familiar to them without a piece of chalk in your hand and a high pitch in your voice. I met a kid on the Long Island Railroad one day, when I was going to a party. I was wearing a hat, and it took him a few seconds to adjust to it. He finally came and sat down, lit a cigarette, and said slowly, 'You never *did* marry, did you, Miss Dunn?'"

"Who was this, Joan? Do I know him?"

"Everyone knew Malcolm. You know, Malcolm O'Brien, the one who used to hide in the closets."

"Oh, him. Sure. What's he doing now?"

"Working in a car-parts plant. Don't faint, but he wants to come back to school."

"They always do."

From the other end of the table came a sudden whoop of laughter. We all turned to look. Tony's head was thrown

back, his face red as he pushed himself away from the table with stiffened arms. John Stanton spoke.

"Tony must have elaborated on one of his unflattering situations."

"And still speaking of unflattering situations, Joan, what about day after day, right here in this school?"

"You're so right, John. If I knew then what I know now."

"That's always the rub, don't you think? They don't put the real stories in the textbooks. I wonder what you think of the education courses now?"

"Not very much. No one told me I was always going to be tired."

"Of course not. You have to find out those things for yourself."

"I have."

"Why don't you get another job?"

"I don't know. I've often thought of it."

"I'd advise you to do more than just think about it. Get out while you still have the chance. Get out while you're still young enough to find something else."

"I really don't know, John. I like kids, even the bad ones. And I love to teach. It's still first love."

"But—"

"I know. 'But' the conditions, the system. Still it's a serious step. Once I left, I doubt if I'd ever come back."

"Well, think it over."

"I will. I promise. But here's a sobering thought. Who'd hire an ex-teacher?"

Just then the bell rang. Blast, I thought. No time for a cigarette today. We all got up hastily, separated the two tables, rearranged the chairs, and made for the door. The student cafeteria, next door to ours, was also emptying, and the two crowds merged. Some boy in the mob called out,

"Looka them teachers. Stoopid." A small boy disengaged himself from the rest and anxiously addressed Yvonne.

"Where's Mr. Gerstenberg?"

"I don't know."

"These teachers don't know much of anything," he muttered to his friend as they turned to fight their way across the corridor. As we entered the elevator, Yvonne said:

"I couldn't hear what Tony was saying, but unflattering situations reminds me of a riotous story that Winnie told us once. It seems that she has a friend who teaches at Henry James Junior High and this same friend is much addicted to Turkish baths. Well, there she was one evening, stretched out in the stream, when out of the mist appears a familiar face. It was one of her students, a nice little girl who was accompanied by an older woman. 'Mrs. Schwartz,' says the girl, 'I'd like you to meet my mother.'"

It had taken us longer than usual to get upstairs, and when I got to my classroom, my boys and girls were still in the hall, waiting for the doors to be unlocked.

"Ah, Miss Dunn. You're late. Where's your late pass?"

"You know the old motto, George, don't do as I do, do as I say."

This was a pleasant group of youngsters, third-termers fresh from junior high, but not as vivid as such groups usually are. This class, too, like nearly every other one in the school, had its colorful characters, or "citizens," as the texts would have it. I unlocked the front door and waited in the hall, just outside the threshold, from where I could see into the room while they filed in. I thought to myself how you could tell what they were going to be like on a certain day just by their posture, the looks on their faces, and the atmosphere in the room. Today, this class was

going to report on books they had read; it was usually a good lesson.

"Class, put the notes for your reports on your desks so they will be ready when you are called on. Remember to stay as close as possible to the outline I gave you. The class may want to question you when you are through, and if they do, do not sit down until all questions are answered. Raise your hand if you want to ask the speaker a question and wait until you are recognized. Don't call out. Any questions? Yes, Castro."

"What book report?"

"See here, Castro, I've been talking about the book report for three weeks now, and this is the first time you've shown signs of life. Where have you been?"

"Where've I been? I been here."

"Well, then, I suggest you have your ears examined."

"Nuttin wrong wit' my ears. You don't talk so good."

"Careful, Castro, you're going too far."

The good mood engendered by the enjoyable lunch hour was slipping away even now. An electric current had passed through the air and was immediately reflected in the class. Some looked at Castro; most looked at me.

"Um sorry."

"So am I. Does anyone want to go first?"

The little crisis had passed and taken the strain with it. Two or three hands shot eagerly up into the air.

"Leibinger, you begin."

"My book is all about Joe DiMaggio. Joe was born in San Francisco and his father was a fisherman. Joe has a brother Dom. Dom plays ball for the San Francisco Seals. Joe tells the story of how he got to be a ballplayer and finally hit the big leagues. I liked this story very much and

recommend it to any boy or girl who likes sports—particularly Joe DiMaggio. Yes? You with the glasses.”

“Joe DiMaggio ain’ the best player in the league. Bobby Shantz is the best player.”

“He didn’t say DiMaggio was the best.”

“That’s what he means.”

“Come, come, gentlemen. Surely the world of sports is big enough for both.”

“Yes?”

“Jerome, where did you get this book?”

“Liberry.”

“Library.”

“Here?”

“Yeah. Any more questions?”

He sat down.

“Liebinger, I can’t give you such a good mark for that because it was so short. You didn’t follow the outline at all, and I’m tempted to think that you didn’t read the book at all. Did you merely scan the inside of the book jacket?”

“No. I swear, Miss Dunn. I read the book.”

“No swearing necessary. I’ll take your word for it. Well, then, Liebinger, what I said is even more important. Why not give a good report if you’ve taken the time to read the book through? Right?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, Miss Dunn.”

“All right. Do better next time. Who’s next? Rosalie? Good.”

The girl who moved to the front of the room did so awkwardly, for both legs were encased in heavy braces and she had to swing herself along with the help of

crutches. She turned to face the class, leaned against the front desk in the row, and smiled. She held her long, neatly written report easily in front of her. As she began to speak, I watched the class from where I stood at the side of the room. They were no longer aware of me at all; their attention was fastened on the girl at the front of the room. It seemed to me that they felt that she had somehow earned the right to attention by her infirmity. The sweetness of her manner baffled and charmed them. I turned back to her.

"... from the time she was very young. Miss Keller was taught by a woman named Anne Sullivan Macy and eventually learned to see people—in a way—by putting her hand on their faces. Helen Keller has traveled all over the world and met many famous people. People all over the world can read about her because this book is written in many different languages. She is still alive and very interested in world conditions and what goes on around her. We are supposed to say why we like this book. Well, I like this book because it shows how a person can be sick—be different from other people—and still be happy. She has suffered a lot in her life, but she is an inspiration to the rest of us. I learned from this book that some people get sick and then get better, and some people get sick and don't get better, really. Like that, I was one of the unlucky ones. I liked this book very much, and I recommend it to everyone. Any questions?"

The class was absorbed in her, raptly attentive. There was not a sound as she swung slowly down the aisle. Her seat was very near the front so she was soon at her place.

In order to seat herself, she had to lay her crutches aside, against the desk and work her way stiffly into a sitting position by unlocking her braces at the knee. As she prepared to do this, the tiny boy seated behind her, looking at

her wide-eyed and solemn, reached out and held her crutches.

"Who will go next?"

The lone hand raised was attached to a boy whom I found irresistibly funny. I had known him for a long time before he appeared in my class, and I liked him immensely. He had, on occasion, confided to me that he wanted to be a cop and that his girl friend approved his choice. He was a tall, loosely jointed youth, flamboyantly dressed. Curls spilled onto his forehead and his upper lip was faintly mustached.

"Well, Carmine, what book are you going to tell us about?"

"Beau Geste."

He shuffled from one foot to another.

"Where are your notes?"

"I don' need none. I got it in da head."

We grinned at each other. *This will be a show*, I thought.

"Well, let's hear all about it."

"Well, there's this here guy, Beau, an he's a soldier. In India. An the English, yeah, the English, they're fightin these here natives. And they're losin. So Beau and his pals are out at this here fort out in the middle of the desert and they get the idea that they'll get together and decide to do somethin to win this here fight. They're gettin tired of it, ya know, and they wanna go home. They bin away long enough, they say. So they get a hold of a guy named Gunga Din, who's on the other side, an he's very important to this story because he carries drinks around to the other guys and so Beau an his pals decide to bribe him so he'll put poison in the water and kill all the other guys. So they do this. And that's the end. Oh, no. I forgot. Beau is in love with a girl. Her father is a soldier too, but he's old and he doesn't

unnerstan'. He doesn't think Beau should marry this daughter. But he does. And that's the end."

"Incredible. Who wrote your book, Carmine?"

"Charles Dickens."

I did not think I could maintain a straight face much longer, but Carmine was playing it straight.

"Really. Did you ever read anything else by Charles Dickens, Carmine?"

He just grinned at me, shifted his weight, and, turning his head, spied a raised hand.

"Yeah?"

"You saw that movie on TV, didn't you?"

"No. My fren' tol' me it."

"Carmine, my friend, he 'tol' you wrong. I'm surprised at you, trying to fool me. I know you from way back. Sit down. You're incorrigible."

"Ha?"

"It's not as bad as it sounds."

When the class was leaving, he shuffled up to the desk, abashed.

"Ya not mad at me, Miss Dunn?"

"Of course not, Carmine. It was a nice try, I guess, but I just hate to see you fail so much."

The seventh period brought another locking-up session since I was in charge of the detention room for the period. I put the materials I would use for the eighth period on my desk, made all closets and desks secure, took my pocketbook and a long piece of foolscap, and went down to a classroom on the first floor, right at the corner of the building, between the boys' gym and an exit. When I arrived, it was to find both doors flung open and a noise like the splintering of furniture filling the area. I ran down the remaining part of the corridor, dashed into the room. Chalk dust filled the

air, the chairs were every which way, and a few were even overturned. About ten boys were knotted into a back corner, right under a window, and I could hear the sounds of scuffling. Flinging my belongings on the desk, I ran to where they were. One boy turned around and saw me. He grabbed another by the arm.

"Let's beat it. Here's the teacher."

I quickly moved into the gap in the circle left by their departure. Looking down, I saw two boys on the floor, rolling back and forth in the narrow aisle. The heavy metal base of the radiator was perilously close.

"Stop that! Stop it!"

They kept right on, straining and pulling at one another, their faces contorted with the effort of their anger, and I could see a bruise deepening on one boy's forehead.

"Get up!" I screamed.

I turned to the five or six boys left, singled one out who was younger than the rest and therefore more likely to obey, and said:

"Go get Mr. Swanson. Quick."

To the others, I gave orders.

"All of you get in the hall and stay there. Shut both doors and don't let anyone in but Mr. Swanson. Go on. Get out."

Not watching to see if they did go or not, I reached over and grabbed the back of one boy's jacket and pulled him sharply back. As he was raised up slightly, the other boy twisted onto his side and worked himself into a kneeling position. I was still grasping the knitted binding of the jacket and shouting, "Stop it! Stop it!" when I saw the other boy free himself. He rested, slouched down on his knees, his breath coming in labored gasps while he touched the swelling bruise with trembling fingers.

"Get up. Go stand in the corner by the front door. Move."

By now, faces were looking in at all the panes. I still held one of them by his coat collar. He, too, slouched against the pull of the jacket, flushed and silent. I let him go finally.

"Sit in this chair. Can you move all right?"

He said nothing but slumped into the seat and buried his head in his arms. I saw the other one standing weakly in the corner and ran to him.

"You hurt? Sit down."

He did so, but sat with his head thrown back and his eyes closed. Blood began to trickle from his nose. I got my handkerchief out of my bag, went to the door.

"Wet this and bring it right back."

In the short space of time that the door was open, necks were craned inside and a few of the more eager ones tried to push past me. They were, all of them, disaster hounds.

"Stay out of here." I was still shouting.

The boy returned. I swung the teacher's chair around.

"Here. Sit here. Put your head back on the desk."

I put the wet handkerchief on the bridge of his nose and slammed the front door shut. Their heavy breathing was subsiding. I leaned back against the blackboard and looked at them. The one with the nosebleed was tall, thin, pallid, and blond. The other, now sitting up and snuffling (was he crying?), was pudgy, with a large pimply face, bushy brown hair, and expressionless brown eyes.

The front door opened and Mr. Swanson appeared, followed by the monitor.

"What happened?"

"I don't know. I arrived, and they were fighting, both of them on the floor. They haven't said a word so far."

The boy at the back of the room started to whine.

"It wasn't my fault. He did it."

"What's your name?"

"George Intorchia."

"What class?"

"Four-G-three."

He turned to the boy at the teacher's desk.

"What's yours?"

"What's my what?" There was hate in his voice.

"Your name."

"Al Cortera."

"Class?"

"Three-A-C-four."

"Either one of you hurt?"

Cortera sneered. "Him hurt me. Don't make me laugh."

Swanson turned to me. "You better make out an accident report anyway. You never can tell. All right. What happened?"

"He said I tried to trip him. I didn't."

"You're a —— liar. Ya had ya big feet all over the aisle."

"Shut up, Cortera. You know what happens when you use that language in front of a woman. You're asking for trouble now and you're going to get it. Get up. Get up, I said. You too."

He waited until they were both in front of him and then opened the door. The halls had cleared, except for the same five or six who, it now appeared, were supposed to be serving detention during that period. Swanson left with Cortera and Intorchia. Six boys came in, seated themselves, and looked at me curiously. They wanted me to tell them about the fight. Swanson had looked grim as he left the room, and they knew it was serious. They all respected the

Dean of Discipline and knew that only something worse than the ordinary run of rudeness and invective could cause him to lose his temper and yell as he had done just now. I acted as if nothing had happened.

"Swanson's mad."

"Give me your detention cards."

"Come on, Joan, tell us all about it."

"Who said that?"

I had just turned around to close the front door when one of the boys had thus called for a recital of the period's misadventure.

"Not one of you leaves this room until I find out who said that."

They continued to look at me blankly. I collected the detention cards and put them on the desk. The damp, bloody handkerchief hung over one end. I wanted to cry.

"Gaglio, put your feet on the floor. What time is it, Cheeseman?"

"Five of."

The time passed in silence. When the bell rang, I stood up.

"Don't leave."

"Ah, come on, Miss Dunn, I gotta go to socca practice."

"No one leaves until I find out who called me by my first name."

Someone muttered an obscenity.

They sat tensely, while outside could be heard the noise of changing classes.

"All right. I did it."

They bolted the doors.

"Come here. What's your name and prefect class?"

"Zolotow. Seven-G-six."

"First name?"

"I thought we weren't supposed to use first names in this room."

"All right, Zolotow, get out."

"Whatcha gonna do?"

"That's my business. Get out of here."

I took a piece of paper from the desk, wrapped the soiled handkerchief in it, and threw it in the wastebasket. I walked the one flight up to my own classroom, wondering where in the name of Heaven I could get an accident report and what I would do with it once I got it. (Later, when I had learned about these things, another teacher said to me, "Write it out, but don't sign it. Don't ever sign anything.")

My next, and final, class was a reading clinic—a class of twelve boys and girls needing remedial work in reading skills. Ordinarily I looked forward to it with enthusiasm, but I was now bone-tired, dragging my feet down the hall. I didn't think I could run if my life depended on it. I did not care if I never saw another human being under thirty.

They waited in the hall for me. As I unlocked the door, one of them, a heavily made-up girl with magnificent eyes, said to me, "You look tired, Miss Dunn."

"I am, Marie, But I guess you are too."

"Not so bad, now. My mother's out of the hospital now, so it's not so bad. The little kids listen to her better than they do to me."

"You've been very good, Marie, taking care of the family while your mother was sick. It's no joke."

She smiled. "I don't mind."

"Hey, Miss Dunn, where ya live?"

"Near the Park. Why?"

"You must know my friends, the Gowanus mob."

"Sorry, Kingman. Haven't had the pleasure."

When they had all taken their seats, I gave each one a small booklet containing columns of words under phonetic symbols, a copy of a scholastic newspaper, and a small piece of paper. They wrote their names and the date on the top line of the paper.

"Let's start with the word drill today."

I drew a large *oo* on the board and made the sound of the diphthong.

"Roger, you begin."

"Fool, tool, scowl—"

"School."

His voice went on haltingly. When I corrected him, it was like listening to someone else talk, for my center of gravity seemed to be outside myself. They could have killed themselves, I thought. They could have split their skulls on the radiator. And all either of them could say was "He tried to trip me."

We progressed to the timed reading test in the newspaper. After that, they would answer the questions and enter their scores in the record they kept in their notebooks. While they read, I continued to sit limply in the chair, conscious only of the hiss of steam escaping from the radiator. They really *could* have killed one another.

I called time eleven minutes later, and they proceeded to the questions. We discussed them, tabulated them, and when the bell had rung ending the last period and the school day, three or four of the children stayed to help me clean up. Marie was the last to go.

"Did you hear about the big fight this afternoon, Miss Dunn? Seventh period?"

"I know all about it, my dear. I was there."

"They shouldn't let those boys stay in school, Miss Dunn. That Al is in my bio class and he drives the teacher crazy."

"I believe you. I never saw him before today, and he nearly finished me. So. Thanks, Marie."

"That's O.K., Miss Dunn. Take it easy."

"You too."

The silence was intense after she left. The school that had been pulsating with noise and energy and excitement all day was suddenly strangely quiet. The teachers got out of the building nearly as quickly as the pupils.

As I walked to the ladies' room, my footsteps sounded twice as loud in the empty corridor. Here and there, classroom doors stood open, and the halls were littered with candy wrappers, broken pencils, cigarette butts, and paper crumpled up into balls and thrown under the radiator grills. After I had combed my hair and splashed cold water on my face, I stood next to the window, leaning on the tiled wall, and quietly smoked a cigarette. When I emerged, Ada, the nearly bent-over-double cleaning woman, was just going into my room to repair the day's damage.

"How are you, Ada?"

"Fine, miss. Thank you."

I put on my hat and coat, picked up my newspaper, walked downstairs, inspected the clutter of papers in my mailbox, and punched my time card. I stood for fifteen minutes on a windy corner waiting for the bus; it was a quieter trip than the outgoing one that morning. When I gained the subway platform, some twenty minutes later, I spied a colleague at the other end of the station. We progressed rather slowly toward each other as the train gasped into the station.

"I haven't seen you in a long . . . have you been?"

"Well, I have that postnasal drip, you know, and then I'm always so tired. You know..."

Not tired enough to stop talking, I thought to myself.

"...don't you, that we're under a terrible strain all day, and of course, conditions aren't getting any better. I have a class this term that is *so* bad. They're driving me crazy. There are some in there that you had last term and I'm sorry to say, they're not very well-mannered. There is one in particular, Castini—"

"Don't remind me of him. It's too painful."

"—who just doesn't seem to know enough to bring a pen to class—"

(Bring a pen to class! She's lucky if he doesn't knife her.)

"—and his notebook. Well, he just won't keep one."

"I know. I had the same trouble with him last term. By the way, did you see that new movie about Michelangelo?"

"No. But that reminds me, I mentioned the name of Michelangelo the other day in class and, do you know, not one child knew who he was.

"They probably thought it was the name of a new dance."

I was trapped for forty minutes of shop talk. The stations crawled slowly by and there was no relief; my wordy colleague went past my station. All I want, I thought, is a little solitude.

A fifteen-minute walk from the station and I was home—tired, bedraggled, and brain-weary. I played a record to try to soothe myself. But what I really wanted more than anything else in the world was a little sleep. I resisted the temptation by busying myself with the laundry that had been delivered during the day. When that was done, I put on my slippers, tied on an apron, and started the dinner—pouring water, hauling out pots, placing knives and forks.

The question of whether or not to make coffee suddenly became insurmountable. I found myself staring out the kitchen window again, but this time the view was chill and dark, and the morning paper, thrown on the desk in the hall, was as it was that morning at seven thirty—neatly folded and not a line of it read.

4. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

YOU KNOW now why I wanted to be a teacher and you know a little about the system that employed me. You know what an average day was like. You may now well ask, "What of the larger issues? What were they? Show us what you thought was wrong."

I will mention some of them now, some of the important educational questions: discipline for students, methods of teaching, character training for the young, and what true teaching is—how instructing a child in any subject or skill goes deeper than the subject matter itself. My concern is certainly for the teacher, who frequently attempts the heroic simply by attempting to teach under the prevailing conditions, but it is primarily for the students. The children are the ones most strongly affected by current educational practices, for they will be the results of them. It is with the fate of the individual boy or girl in mind that the following chapter must be read, and it is with full realization of what they gain or lose from public-school education today that you must decide whether the schools are having a good or a bad effect. We are concerned here with the molding of human beings, and nothing is more important than that.

Here, then, are the theories in practice.

Spare the Rod

"They just won't listen to me," sighed the bewildered history teacher. "I keep *telling* them not to play cards."

The atmosphere of his classroom was undoubtedly social and, among the students at any rate, co-operative. When it became obvious that this addiction to cards was to be a term project, the teacher realized that his wistful hints had been ineffectual. Had he failed to register opposition when the seal was broken on the first set? Or had he planned to teach history between hands?

High-school years are formative years, years of loyalties and enthusiasms that represent varying degrees of emotional and physical turmoil, and for these reasons it is not the time to remove disciplinary restraints. It is, however, the time to change them, to make them more subtle, but at the same time no less forceful. The adolescent cannot be scolded like a child; neither can he be expected to discipline himself like an adult. The adolescent is in the process of becoming for the first time a responsible member of a large social group. It is precisely because he is unstable that those in charge of him must be firm.

Two bits of advice came my way during my first term as a teacher. One was that there was no teaching a class if it could not be controlled, and the other was to forget I was a lady. The first, I learned, was true, the second false. But the problem remained. If classes requiring strict discipline had to be kept under control, how could I do so with dignity, firmness, tact, humor? How, in short, could I be both admired and liked? I would have gratefully traded all my education courses for the answer; had at least one of them been at all concerned with questions like these, they would all have served a more useful purpose. Thus, learn-

ing to enforce discipline was the beginning of my self-education as a teacher, and it was not at all like the textbook preparation. Here was a typical situation, my first meeting with a G (low I.Q.) class in third-term English.

I stood in the front of the room, to one side of the desk. It was bad practice to be seated, for the children took it as a sign that you were not disposed to regard the business of the coming term seriously. The room filled rapidly.

"What are you doing outside? Do you belong in this class?"

"Yeah."

"Well, step inside."

"The bell ain't rung yet."

So, I thought, this class is to be graced with at least one equivocator.

I had been teaching in this school for a year, so the children knew me, some personally, some by reputation. Scanning their faces, I recognized some whom I knew personally or by reputation.

"This is English thirty-six-G. My name is Miss Dunn. I'm going to hand out Delaney cards. Fill in the information asked for at the top of the card, in ink. I'll tell you when to pass them up. Any questions?"

"Yeah. What's this here class?"

"E-thirty-six-G."

"What's your name?"

"Miss Dunn."

"How yuh spell it?"

I wrote it on the board.

"I can't read your writin."

"D-U-N-N."

"Oh, yeah. My fren' had you last term. He says you're nice teacher."

"That remains to be seen. Put your feet on the floor, please."

"Why? There ain't nobody in that seat."

"There will be. Get your feet off the chair."

We measured each other silently. Finally the cleated shoes thudded on the floor.

"Hey, teach, I ain' got oo pen."

"Borrow one, then."

"Hey, Ant'oy. Gimme peco."

"Yuh kiddin'? I never had a pen."

Loud laughter. They felt they had the upper hand. My throat was dry; I tensed for the inevitable test—which was swift in coming. The class watched, enjoying itself.

A boy got up and walked over to the window. Leaning both elbows on the sill, he cupped his chin in his hands and gazed out at the gas tanks. There was silence. They watched me steadily, for the challenge was unmistakable and could not be avoided.

"Sit down, please."

No answer. He remained immobile.

"I said sit down."

Still no response.

"Do you hear? I asked you to sit down."

He turned and fixed on me a look of scorn. A friend entered on cue.

"Hey, Joey, the teacher's talkin to ya."

"Yes, Joseph. Miss Dunn asked you three times to sit down."

He turned, yawned elaborately, and shuffled away from the window.

Instead of going directly to his seat by turning down the aisle, he stepped up on a chair and swung himself over to the other side, an added fillip of calculated insolence.

"I want each and every one of you to understand that I'm the teacher. Not Joe. And this is how I want you to behave in my class. You speak only to answer a question or to say something constructive. You keep your feet off the chairs. You take your seats when you come in. Is that understood? Now pass up those cards—quietly."

They received this in silence, unimpressed, merely awaiting the next outburst. So was I. There could be no actual teaching the first day of the term, since no books were distributed as yet. We were "getting acquainted." I noticed a boy at the rear of the room devouring a comic book, head bent and brow furrowed with concentration.

"The boy in the last seat in the second row."

Someone supplied the name, Vinny.

"Vincent."

He looked up. It took a few seconds for him to realize where he was.

"Wa."

"I suggest you put away the comic book."

From somewhere at the side of the room came a muttered obscenity as Vinny rolled up *Ghoulish Gags* and stuffed it in the back pocket of his dungarees.

"Just for your information, we speak English in this room."

A few faces registered amazement; not at the word but at my reaction to it. A veteran with combat experience was supposed to be immune to the language of the troops.

The bell rang. Before the echo died, the class, moving as one person, stampeded for the door.

"Sit down."

They stopped short, astonished.

"Sit down. Don't leave until I dismiss you. Get back in your seats."

They sat down, except one boy who stood at the door, hand on knob.

"You too."

When finally released, they could not wait to get out the door, and as they scrambled across the front of the room, not one looked me in the face. The class, the first of ninety-six meetings, was over. If this period was an indication, the term promised successive stages of hostility, resentment, and resignation, and although I believed I *could* teach them, I knew that every class would be a trial, every lesson an ordeal. The Delaney cards in my hand were grubby and finger-marked. The one on the top was signed Joe DiMaggio.

The next class began to enter, fresh-faced youngsters with notebooks, anticipating work. They were just babies, first-termers and still awed by the fact. One chubby little boy approached the desk and asked, "May I open the window? It smells in here."

I laughed.

"Yes. Push it out from the bottom."

Still shaky from the last class, I managed a weak smile. I distributed the same cards as before, gave the same instructions, and within five minutes, they were returned to me, clearly printed in neat black letters. I told them about the term's work, the book reports, the compositions, tests, and grammar lessons.

"Any questions? Yes."

"What will the first book report be?"

"A biography."

Pens were pulled out, and forty-one children noted the information: book report.

Fifteen minutes remained. I decided to talk about words. Mentioning that English is primarily the study of words

and their meanings, I asked them to name other languages that had given root words to English. We discussed recent world events that affected language. The children trotted out anecdotes concerning brothers overseas, and the "foreign people who talked so funny." When I questioned them, their eyes roamed over the room, up to the ceiling, rested musingly on the sun-filled windows. Then, abruptly, one might sit suddenly upright.

"Oh, I know. I know, Miss Dunn, I know."

The time passed, pleasantly, profitably. Discipline? A matter of calling to attention three children who were leafing through other textbooks. Later, two girls giggled at the small boy so anxious to be heard. But this was an honor class, a joy and a delight, for which one paid dearly. The brighter students, siphoned off into special classes, represented one or possibly two bright spots in a teacher's day. The rest was monotony—or worse.

After a fast forty-minute lunch in the basement cafeteria, I rushed upstairs for a cigarette since teachers were not allowed to smoke in their cafeteria. (When I "bounced" students from the washroom for smoking, they invariably answered with, "You do.")

On my program for the term were three classes after lunch. These classes were regular, neither G nor H, and were made up of children like the girl from South America, bewildered and upset by our noisy school, who always asked me to recommend books for her and never failed to thank me in her quaint and precise speech. If I remember rightly, she had a particular affection for Stephen Leacock, and would giggle as she remembered what she read. One youngster brought me a beautiful sea shell, saying, "Put it on your ear, Miss Dunn." And there was the boy, an aspiring violinist, who went to great lengths to get me tickets

for a TV show, and then sent them to the wrong address. They did not expect favors or higher marks, as some honor students might, and by the way it was always an interesting experience to see who argued with you over marks. The brightest kids sometimes haggled shamelessly over one or two points. It was even more revealing to notice some of the gay personalities change after your refusal to raise a grade. Occasionally, one sulked for weeks, and nothing I could say could coax him out of it.

So my average classes turned out to be just that, with a few odd birds for variety's sake. Like the boy who turned his seat toward the window and sunbathed. When I sounded him out concerning the possibility of his joining us sometime later that term, he answered, no, he was just hanging around school until he reached his majority (seventeen), and then, coming into his inheritance of freedom, he planned to cast himself on the economic market.

"You don't care if you fail?"

"Fail? I failed this class twice already."

"What do you expect to do when you leave school?"

"How do I know? I just want to get out of this crazy place."

He resented my infringement of his right to unquestioned failure, and I, for my part, saw absolutely no need, duty, or responsibility to cajole, coerce, trick, or otherwise trap this frankly unwilling specimen into the groves of Academe. Many were the days I spent extra hours after school helping children who wanted help, but this bland insouciance was impregnable.

I did not consider him a real problem, although he might erupt at any moment. The individual troublemaker in an ordinary class was as nothing compared to the gangs of them in G classes. But the question remains: How do you

discipline a class? Why is it necessary? What good does it do?

First—how? Discipline, I found, is only secured by an imposition of will, and you either have the ability to do this or you have not. No school can teach it, no course in education secure it for you, and no amount of wanting it bring it about. It is a talent, and only those who possess and use it can teach.

Good disciplinarians are forceful people, confident people, people with recognizable aims in training youth, which, like a thoroughbred, can sense nervousness in someone trying to handle it. When you ask a student to sit down, and he says no, he won't sit down, you face the basic disciplinary problem. You win or you lose; there is no draw. To win you must have just the right amount of confidence in yourself. You must speak with certainty, slightly tinged with amazement that your word was questioned in the first place. At a moment like this, two wills are locked, and a momentary faltering is understandable, but if you fail consistently and take the easier course, you will be corrupted.

Schoolboy vanity is so vocal that your defection will be common knowledge in a matter of days. If this happens frequently enough and in serious situations, you are finished as a teacher, for it is not too long a step from disregarding you as a person to dismissing what you say as a teacher. If you don't have this necessary faculty of making your will acceptable over the will or inclination of your students, do not entertain thoughts of a successful teaching career. Your professional life will be miserable, and, in the long run, you may do more harm than good. You will know if you have the quality in question as soon as you start

teaching. If it is not there, it would be wise to get out. Good teachers, like heroes, are born and not made.

Why is discipline necessary? Because education is a process of growth and maturation and must be brought about in an orderly fashion. Education involves the transfer of ideas on a multitude of subjects to younger minds, and this cannot be done unless those minds are disposed to permit such a transfer. Discipline is necessary because our society is based on a system of law and order, and unless we want lawlessness in an adult citizenry we must insist upon youth's becoming lawful—that is, receptive, and not resistant, to legitimate authority. Discipline is necessary because it is in the nature of youth to be imperfect, malleable, plastic, going in many directions at once. Youthful energies must be channeled—and by whom if not by parents and teachers? It is in the nature of human beings to flourish best under a rational rule; with young human beings it becomes a necessity. Not to do so is to cheat youth of its natural privilege of relying on adult solidity, of feeling secure during the most important time in their lives. Are we doing them a service if we set them adrift on a chartless sea? If they cannot find the right way alone and untaught, is it really their fault? Could you? The teacher must discipline the class, for the sake of the child and the sake of the subject.

Of what value is discipline? Competently and fairly administered, discipline has many good results. It makes the child tractable, pleasant to be with, conscious of his duties and responsibilities to others and to himself. He becomes better disposed to study, scholar or not. He can be made appreciative, courteous, respectful, well spoken, healthy, and wise—sorry, I cannot promise wealth. Well-disciplined kids would make many public places in New York City

infinitely more enjoyable—places like the movies, the subways, the street corners, the schools. But not all teachers are agreed on the need, much less the value, of discipline. Of the many variations of thought on this vital subject, the line of demarcation is clearest between those who think that discipline is basic to teaching, and, indeed, must precede it, and those who think that discipline should not be administered by the teacher at all, because it is then an artificial, arbitrary thing that has no meaning to the students and may do them permanent damage.

My belief is the former—that discipline is vital. It is a prerequisite for mastering any subject matter, for the simple reason that if you do not listen, you do not learn. It is also essential for that more important subject of preparation for the future, for living as an independent, responsible adult. I liked to teach my students respect for law as well as English. But how can love of peace be inculcated if the class is constantly in revolt? My classroom discipline might have been called arbitrary, for I asked no one whether or not he wished to be controlled. I went ahead and did it, which was, I believe, my duty as a teacher. But it is not artificial, for learning good behavior from adults in a position of authority is the natural process. This process can only function as a transfer from higher to lower, from older to younger. It is romantic to think that one child will successfully or normally discipline another child, and it is folly to think that a child can be disciplined by an infant.

Nor do I believe that discipline damages a child, provided that it is justly and swiftly administered and the cause forgotten with the cure. A well-disciplined child is a child in whom elders have a constant interest, as the

heedless child is frequently the product of neglect. In extreme cases, the one so neglected rises up to judge his elders by becoming their terror. The next time you are in a bus and spot a mother and child in difficulties, notice how interested the mother is in her vagrant offspring. "Johnny," she nags wistfully, gazing into her mirror, "stop pushing the lady."

One school of thought, the progressive school, holds that the pupils will discipline themselves; if the subject matter is well taught by the teacher, the pupils will be too interested in what is going on to talk to one another, look out the window, throw chalk and erasers, overturn chairs, or bandy words with the teacher. An addendum to this theory is that formal discipline is not really needed because most of the time the children will be working in committee and there will be group discipline. If a particular child becomes obstreperous, the others will administer discipline, more meaningful because youth has chastised itself. Ideally this is a good thing, but it has had no practical basis in my experience or in the experience of the many teachers with whom I have discussed it. There are, on the other hand, many educators wholly dedicated to the principle of a student-disciplined classroom. They profess to use it to great advantage and with much success in all classes—even the G's. I used it (the discussion, student-group approach) many times on an experimental basis but never gave it a permanent part in my lesson planning for the following good reasons: it depended very much on the "spirit" of the class (not the I.Q.); it was time-consuming to a degree that precluded lessons on formal subjects (grammar, composition, spelling); it too frequently became bogged down in private conversations. As a steady diet, it excluded the teacher to the point of impersonality.

the illustrations showing a group of boys and girls at a high-school dance in a festooned auditorium, and I said:

"Perhaps someone has had an experience, been out with a friend, and has been embarrassed because he didn't know the right thing to do."

A moment later a hand flapped at the back of the room.

"Yes?"

"Yeah, a funny thing hapna mc las' week. I took my girl down Club 12 on Eas' Firs' Street. You know, the one witha big neon sign outside, and when we got inside I order a beer and the waiter he puts it ona table and I'm talking so much with my fren's there that I hit the beer and it fall all over my girl's dress. She got *so* mad at me, Miss Dunn. I trieda explain ta her and then all my fren's laugh at me. I'm tellin ya. I fel' so stoopid."

The gap between the naïve little people in the illustration and my beer-drinking student was unbridgeable. The class did not discipline this boy; they egged him on, laughed at him, became his audience. Even though my children had been attentive and co-operative up to this point, they were only too glad to digress.

One year, in the spring term, I was given a senior honor class as a source of material for the school magazine, of which I was faculty adviser. They were outstanding young men and women, and we ranged far and wide in our discussions. I was observed with this class many times that term, and each time what I had planned with them with their co-operation was followed to its conclusion. They were older and could generalize from their own experience and from the experience of others that they read about. We finished the term's work as I had planned it, two weeks before the term ended. One of the boys in the class mentioned the Great Books Plan, and I asked them if they

would be interested in using some of the books on that list for their final book report. They were, and together we compiled a list. The class formed committees and reported on their reading. They turned their chairs around to face the rest of the class and gave their impressions and evaluations of the chosen books. I sat at the back of the room and asked questions myself. I had told them to finish reading the book they had selected even if they found it difficult to understand. My theory was that they, with their good minds, could give as much concentration to the written word as they gave to a knotty algebraic problem. It was even good to see them baffled, to see ideas and inferences play across their faces, to hear them question one another and me, to laugh at their quick wit and apt allusions. It was a most stimulating two weeks. This procedure was workable to a high degree in this class, but only, I concluded, because they were an exceptional group, interested to begin with and receptive to new ideas. But in their frequent digressions, they roamed too far afield. Their conversations grew pointless, their laughter just a shade wild. They were the best class I had, but I found that even with them such committee activities could only be the pleasant interlude after the real work of the term was completed.

I have given these instances to prove, first, that in a "bad" class the discipline must be administered by the teacher because the class is simply not interested enough in school to fret over any time lost through discipline problems. Rather they enjoy it; it varies their day and makes the time pass more quickly. A bad class just doesn't absorb the notion of committee work, discussion groups, and self-discipline. They are simply not bright enough to group and relate ideas, which is the *sine qua non* of the self-disciplining methodology. These new ideas only appear to deepen their

expressed belief that all teachers are stark mad. In a good class, discipline can be administered by the pupils, but the teacher must still exercise the disciplinary prerogative lest they think (and this is the least of the reasons) that you are not interested in what they are doing. It is also necessary to prevent them from relapsing into noisy discussions of the senior prom, the faculty, or the latest newspaper scandal, since they are highly vocal on all topics. The teacher's role as disciplinarian can be abdicated only at the cost of order.

"What's It Got to Do with My Life?"

The process by which one, usually older and supposedly wiser, transfers knowledge to another, usually younger and supposedly eager, is connected with man's primal desire for self-perpetuation. There was never a great movement in history without leaders and disciples, prophets and followers, teachers and pupils.

Great teachers in the past disseminated personal wisdom—the young Jesus taught in the temple; Socrates suffered the questions of his admirers. Most teachers, however, have not originated wisdom or knowledge but have been rather the medium of its transference to others. They have acted in a necessary drama—the interpretation of the accumulated facts and impressions, understandings, explanations, discoveries, and beauties, that we call the arts and sciences. In playing this part, they have contributed much, often quickening language, deepening and enlarging that inestimable endowment. All of us have shared in the learning process, with success, with failure, with apathy, or with enjoyment—and maybe we remember a few of our teachers, most probably the strict ones. We recall the long expectancy in June heat until vacation released us to summer joys and

ultimate boredom. Perhaps we met, in college, teachers whose special qualities of mind and heart seemed adequate to our own widening knowledge of the world and its ways. Things they said came back to us on waves of consciousness as life filled out our outlines and as the things they knew would happen to us, happened.

Many have been interested in this process, but few have been sufficiently interested to become permanently involved in it as teachers. All must be taught, but, clearly, not all must be teachers. Literature as well as life proves this. Chaucer's clerk, obviously fit, would "gladly teach." But what of the senior Wackford Squeers, cuffing his waifs at Dotheboy's Hall? We can criticize such teachers and assay the rightness or wrongness of previous educational systems. But what of the close contemporary scene? How is youth today, willing or no, led to the founts of knowledge?

There is a course that must be taken by all who aspire to be teachers in New York, called the history of education. It was illuminating but had little to do with teaching. One learned all about tiny Roman girls weaving in vestibules and sturdy young Spartans involved with the arts of war. Medieval choir schools and their strict curriculums were minutely detailed. One observed the eclectic tutorial education given to the young of the wealthy Renaissance families and eavesdropped on Rousseau, rhapsodizing over the innocent wisdom of his jungle-trained "noble savages." According to the convictions of your professor, you found or did not find something to admire in this long and frequently amusing history of how our ancestors fretted over the age-old questions, "How can I get them to know what I know? How can I get them to think as I think, believe what I believe?"

However, educational history did teach us one important fact—that it repeats itself. Questions are posed today that have already been answered. Experiments, proved negative and costly, are undertaken anew. History reveals that not all children can be taught at an advanced level, and that standards are inevitably lowered as the number of students increases. We do not listen. We think that if only we hit upon the right way to teach, all will come right. The right way, it is now affirmed, has been found and is epitomized in two words—meaningfulness and motivation. Ostensibly we are now waiting for everything to come right.

What are these controversial methods, playing such an important part in current educational practice? Methods are the means to an end. The end is learning, the retention of facts, impressions, values, on the part of the student. The means are ways of communicating facts, impressions, and values, on the part of the teacher. The division is between the traditional and the progressive schools of thought. To overstate the case, the traditional school concentrates on ends, the progressive on means. The difference in theory is sharp, even though many teachers, usually the best ones, combine ideas from both. The trouble is that there are extremists in both camps who blind themselves to each other's good qualities. And the extremists of progressivism are currently in the saddle. The educator of this school has a closed mind. He refuses to see anything worth while in the ideas of others. I was once mentioned to the principal by someone in authority as being too strict a disciplinarian because I did not always smile at my classes. The dishonesty of the whole situation was later revealed to me when the same person promptly assigned me five discipline classes for the coming term. "You handle them so well," he said, confidently.

ultimate boredom. Perhaps we met, in college, teachers whose special qualities of mind and heart seemed adequate to our own widening knowledge of the world and its ways. Things they said came back to us on waves of consciousness as life filled out our outlines and as the things they knew would happen to us, happened.

Many have been interested in this process, but few have been sufficiently interested to become permanently involved in it as teachers. All must be taught, but, clearly, not all must be teachers. Literature as well as life proves this. Chaucer's clerk, obviously fit, would "gladly teach." But what of the senior Wackford Squeers, cuffing his waifs at Dotheboy's Hall? We can criticize such teachers and assay the rightness or wrongness of previous educational systems. But what of the close contemporary scene? How is youth today, willing or no, led to the founts of knowledge?

There is a course that must be taken by all who aspire to be teachers in New York, called the history of education. It was illuminating but had little to do with teaching. One learned all about tiny Roman girls weaving in vestibules and sturdy young Spartans involved with the arts of war. Medieval choir schools and their strict curriculums were minutely detailed. One observed the eclectic tutorial education given to the young of the wealthy Renaissance families and eavesdropped on Rousseau, rhapsodizing over the innocent wisdom of his jungle-trained "noble savages." According to the convictions of your professor, you found or did not find something to admire in this long and frequently amusing history of how our ancestors fretted over the age-old questions, "How can I get them to know what I know? How can I get them to think as I think, believe what I believe?"

However, educational history did teach us one important fact—that it repeats itself. Questions are posed today that have already been answered. Experiments, proved negative and costly, are undertaken anew. History reveals that not all children can be taught at an advanced level, and that standards are inevitably lowered as the number of students increases. We do not listen. We think that if only we hit upon the right way to teach, all will come right. The right way, it is now affirmed, has been found and is epitomized in two words—meaningfulness and motivation. Ostensibly we are now waiting for everything to come right.

What are these controversial methods, playing such an important part in current educational practice? Methods are the means to an end. The end is learning, the retention of facts, impressions, values, on the part of the student. The means are ways of communicating facts, impressions, and values, on the part of the teacher. The division is between the traditional and the progressive schools of thought. To overstate the case, the traditional school concentrates on ends, the progressive on means. The difference in theory is sharp, even though many teachers, usually the best ones, combine ideas from both. The trouble is that there are extremists in both camps who blind themselves to each other's good qualities. And the extremists of progressivism are currently in the saddle. The educator of this school has a closed mind. He refuses to see anything worth while in the ideas of others. I was once mentioned to the principal by someone in authority as being too strict a disciplinarian because I did not always smile at my classes. The dishonesty of the whole situation was later revealed to me when the same person promptly assigned me five discipline classes for the coming term. "You handle them so well," he said, confidently.

The "new" methods—many of them actually old and in practice for many years, but so difficult today to separate from their guiding philosophy—are mainly these: learning, through discussion, panel reports, student committees, newspapers, radio, and television, and in its extreme but logical form, having the students plan the curriculum and choose the books and topics to be studied. It is easy to see that, should these methods be followed consistently and as a matter of practice as they are in some schools, the role of the teacher becomes increasingly limited. The advocates of these theories like to think that even if the teacher's role becomes smaller, it becomes more important. But I have seen the role abused. The teacher can abdicate his authority altogether, or he can use this convenient means to guide youth the wrong way. He can easily sit back and let the children amuse themselves term after term, or he can use his popularity as an "easy" teacher to bolster up, by silence if not by actual acknowledgment, their half-formed ideas of what constitutes, for example, legitimate authority or good literature. Anarchism will always appeal to the undisciplined mind more than constitutionality, and Mickey Spillane more than Shakespeare. It is my contention that no teacher worthy of his salt will enjoy being bossed around by beardless youths and giddy girls. If you are a teacher, teach. Further, the children suffer academically because learning is neglected, and the time that should have been devoted to skull work in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking is given over to chatter. Nobody knows this better than the children. They want to be taught step by step, so that they can see their progress. The duller they are, the more important and immediate is this need. And I am afraid that they are all aware of what is going on when a teacher takes a holiday under the guise of a discussion

period. The children also suffer personally, because the new methods are designed to teach them that an ability to talk at the drop of an eraser is an indication of an educated person. By talk I do not mean intelligent discourse on a particular subject or in response to a particular question. I mean the indiscriminate vocal contributions at a given signal, which the progressives encourage so hopefully. Also, the child becomes confused under the new methods. He is still a child and knows it; it is natural that he should wonder about adults who do not know it, too. He is muddled when teachers ask him to "integrate his experiences." He does not know how to spell the words, let alone what they mean. (And he cannot spell them because he has not been drilled sufficiently in spelling.) He wonders when he is called upon to express "ideas" or "impressions."

How much more does the older student wonder when he arrives at high school to learn, only to find himself greeted by teachers who worship him simply because he is young and ignorant while they themselves are fallen from that pristine state. What goes on in the mind of a child when he comes to school to learn and is greeted by a teacher who rhapsodizes, "You teach me. Tell me of your wonderful and vital experiences. Tell me how you have absorbed higher mathematics by toting up your mother's botcher bill, how you saw chemistry in the coffee pot and physics in the light switch. Share with me your experience of finding life in a back alley, of learning to live with people through the movies. Tell me your experiences, for I know you have had them, and I'll try to find a textbook to substantiate them. If I can't find a book to do that, we will do without a book. But talk, talk, talk. Do not think of this as a class. This is a wishing well. I am not a teacher. I am a buddy. We are all pals together, so tell me all."

However, this new system in methodology harms the children most by failing to instill in them a sense of personal responsibility and by failing to teach them the necessity and the value of self-discipline. Everything is done in a group. The child loses his identity and his responsibility for himself. Praise is group praise; blame is group blame. Where is all this leading? No one knows, least of all the teacher. But he may like it that way. It is exciting. However, the student does not always share this enthusiasm. He sometimes misses the point entirely, as did one boy in a special class, composed of fifteen bad boys, young terrorists, truants, and the like. (They stayed in one room for four periods a day and did not change classes with the rest of the school. The idea was to segregate the worst boys in order to make scholastic life bearable for the teachers who would otherwise have found them in their classes, and it certainly fulfilled this aim. But in time, it became a mark of honor to be in this class because its members did not study regular subjects, played baseball one or two periods a day, came in late, and went home early. Many boys, dissatisfied with regular classes, strove to get into this one. Soon there was a waiting list.)

My story concerns a jewel of a youth who made the group without even really trying. He was a goggle-eyed, gawky boy who walked with a rolling, apelike gait. His greeting to pupil or teacher was a "squaring off" in the manner of a prize fighter while he mumbled—shuffling all the while with his fists in front of his face and his squashed-in fedora hanging on the back of his head—"Come on. Come on. I'll kill ya, so he'p me, I'll kill ya." This was sheer bravado, since everyone knew he was a coward, but nevertheless he had a very high nuisance value, and when he was put into the special class, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

The corridors seemed to be free of him, and we all thought he might have at last found his place, but our speculations proved false.

I was standing in the front hall one day, taking advantage of the momentary quiet to chat with a friend who had had this boy in her class, when he himself came ambling down the hall and greeted her warmly.

"Hiya."

"Well, Al. How are you? I haven't seen you all term. How have you been?"

"How've I been, she says? I'm goin crazy."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, I'm in that there class, you know, the special class. You know what I mean?"

"Sure. But I thought you'd like it there."

"Me! Like it! On accounta the class, I gotta quit school. That guy's drivin' me nuts."

"Why?"

"I'm tryna tell ya. That there teacher's *so stoopid*. He don' even know enough to let us outa class when the bell rings."

Today, in the atomic era, when scientists and science-fiction editors talk confidently of reaching the moon and children have practically discarded the saddle for the space helmet, educators are still undecided about the best way to teach the alphabet. They go through agonies because two and two equal four and a way must be found to teach that disturbing fact without mentioning numbers. The poor grade-school teacher finds herself emptying gallons of water into pint containers because some educational theorist (who probably has not taught in thirty years) has decided that her little charges might be permanently scarred if exposed to the brutal fact that $2 + 2 = 4$. The teacher finds that

the children are more interested in the mess that's been made and would rather track water all up and down the aisles than draw any arithmetical conclusions from the feverish pouring that has been going on. In addition, she must feel and look a perfect fool. It is at such an early age and under such watery conditions that the idea of the "stupid teacher" is born. It dies hard.

And if elementary arithmetic causes agonies, anything nonscientific becomes practically insurmountable. It must be made "meaningful"—that is, anything taught must be translatable into the everyday life of the student. Mind you, this also applies should the child be only five or six years old. In other words, the teacher must work backward from the pupils to himself and the knowledge that he is equipped (and being paid) to impart. It also means that all concerned must have had the same experience in order for any one thing to be taught to all. The alphabet, to the devotees of the advanced progressive school, represents a definite challenge. Shall we have them learn letters first and words later or words first and letters later? Which will impress them more? Which will go straight to the mind of the child and fix there, quivering but firm? Not content with mere conjecture on this point, it is decided (in committee, of course) to plan an experimental group. A school is selected; a teacher is chosen. Which came first, the letter or the word?

After a year, two years, depending on the budget and the number of willing principals on hand to allow these programs to be put in practice in their schools, the experiment is over and conclusions are drawn. The results usually become binding. If this experimental group concludes that it is more meaningful to learn words first and then letters, that is what must be taught henceforth. A new directive is issued and might conceivably reach a teacher who had

been teaching letters first. The reaction to this new directive would depend largely on the number of years this person had been teaching. If it were twenty years and he were within a mere fifteen years of retirement, he would shrug his shoulders and do what he had always done. If he were a neophyte, anxious to please and lacking a healthy skepticism toward officialdom, he would immediately incorporate the change in procedure into his own planning, but his brow might wrinkle slightly—the other plan had *seemed* to be working well.

High-school teaching, however, revolved around a word—motivation—that I first heard in this connection in my college education courses. Learning, I was taught, is not its own excuse for being. Motivation means giving meaningful, experientially significant reasons why a lesson or series of lessons (a unit) should be studied. Meaningfulness has thus graduated to motivation and the harried elementary-school teacher with her quarts of water is not far removed from the high-school teacher with an unmotivated *Macbeth* on his hands. The matchless Shakespearean language recording the drama of an ambitious man's ultimate destruction through his traffic with evil finds no interested audience in modern youth. Meter will not motivate the class that has never experienced poetry. No experience, no motivation, no meter, no good. But draw a parallel between meter and bop and you are dynamic. Man, that is teaching. That is the most. Dig that crazy, mixed-up Scot!

Macbeth may have been drudgery to previous generations of students, but it is doubtful that the classic was compromised as it is today. There's the rub. The child today takes, and in many cases is urged to take, the easiest way. He is advised to scan *Classic Comics*, and after that taxing chore is done, to see the movie, if one is available. Then,

after the beauty and the import are lost, he is wheedled into attempting the original. He rebels. "I seena pitcha," he mutters defensively. And even if the teacher is successful in "selling" Shakespeare to her gun-shy charges, the memory of the play remains for all time the comic-book memory.

"Why was the escape of Fleance of such importance to the plot?" I hopefully asked the senior class.

"Because," offered a preconditioned classicist, "Macbeth was afraid the kid would finger him for the murder."

I taught Shakespeare to many classes. A few were interested, most were indifferent; but the only motivation I used was the obvious value of such a work as a classic of the English language. If the classes found it hard to understand, I helped them work for understanding since I believed that the fault, if such it was, was not with the writer but with those who read him. This is not to say that I did not make use of modern instances and parallels in teaching Shakespeare. I did use them, to a great extent at times, but always with the expressed opinion that the play came first, and that contemporary evidence of its truth was merely further evidence of the author's genius. The amount of interpretive "watering-down" on the part of educators today, whose legitimate role is rather to raise the level of awareness and comprehension, is shocking. The teacher's enthusiasm for his subject is still the best form of motivation; at least it is the only honest one. Treating the *Odyssey* as a script for "This Is Your Life" in the hope that it will become meaningful corrupts both the classic and the child. It is a trick, empty and shallow as all tricks are, and it cannot possibly succeed.

However, there are teachers who do not teach Shakespeare or one of the other few classics now available in high

schools. For some teachers I knew, the story was too old, or outworn, or too much trouble, and it was no accident that the classics were always the easiest texts to find in the book room. I suspect that these teachers had just given up the struggle to teach anything difficult. They cannot really be blamed. The prevailing idea regarding texts is that if one is too difficult, get an easier, more "modern" one. Should that still prove too challenging, there is always the newspaper or the "joke" book. The progressive teacher prides himself on his ability to teach from any text, and because we persist in the sentimental error of considering all children teachable, our high schools are filled with children who cannot read. Some show of scholastic advancement must be kept up. Accordingly, they are given easier books to read. As the number of illiterate students increases, so does the number of elementary texts. Poetry, drama, novels are supplanted by "modernized" classics, short stories, and books of social or political essays. The print gets larger, the pictures more numerous, and I fear that the next and final development will be the substitution of pictures for words. Language faces a similar dissolution. Grunts may sometime be acceptable as words and all feeling expressed by the extended inflection of one basic vowel. We shall foster a race of Eliza Doolittles, and what is worse, we shall be proud of their "Aooooow's." And the niceties of thought will disappear with the words to express them and the books in which others have expressed them before. Unfortunately, many educators today are delighted with such developments, for they feel they are getting "to the people" at last. It is rather the people who are getting at them, with the results that are to be expected whenever the direction of a vital institution is given to those who are unequipped to handle it and not interested in learning

how. The educational level sinks to the lowest common denominator, and, ironically, no one benefits, not even the most ignorant, for he finds his ignorance accepted as the norm. All those more intelligent, those capable of being intellectually advanced, find formal education less and less of a challenge. I suggest that youth never knew that learning was *such* a bitter pill until it was so elaborately coated.

The contemporary learning process is further confused by curriculum planning. Three diplomas are offered by public high schools: the academic, the commercial, and the general. The first is college preparatory, the commercial trains students for clerical work and certain business schools, and the third usually means that the bearer has occupied school space for four years—probably within sight of his bulging dossier in the dean's office—although there are now some schools where the G student will be accepted for further study.

Let's look at what these various graduates have been studying for four years. They must all take four years of English, three years of history, and four years of health education. Here they branch off. The academic students must take three years of a foreign language, science, or mathematics. The commercial students must take three years of stenography, typing, or bookkeeping. The general students take a conglomeration of courses not directed to any definite end, for it is just hoped that those not planning to continue their education will eventually earn enough credits just to graduate. Naturally enough, most of these classes are designed to inculcate skills rather than to teach any factual or abstract knowledge. The shop classes are by far the most popular with boys in this group, and the girls take a certain amount of cooking, sewing, and art weaving, which is a simple form of needlework and design.

For four years of such activity, the G student receives a diploma, and it is significant that the number of G students in the city schools is rising rapidly. One might ask whether children are getting dumber or whether school is getting to be too easy to be taken seriously.

It is also possible for students in all groups to elect courses to fulfill their credit requirements. Present-day curriculum planning is concerned solely with extremes of intelligence. The intelligent and the stupid get all the attention, while the great undistributed middle goes its own haphazard way. An increasing amount of time and money is being spent on clever ways of doing nothing. More matter, we might beg with Queen Gertrude, and less art.

It has been my experience to work on student programming. A committee of teachers put in a tremendous amount of work at the end of each term assigning classes to every pupil in the school, about four thousand in all. It is appalling to see the amount of paper work and bookkeeping necessary for the perennial failures, the students whose plan cards are covered with red circles. It is quite possible that a given child has been failing the same subjects consistently for terms, but he must remain in school and someone must figure out a program for him.

It seems to me that there is a fallacy in this preoccupation with coaxing high-school students to study, a basic error of judgment. That error is the submission of the school to the student—and it is a total submission since, in theory, even intelligent students must be "motivated." Education has changed from a privilege to a right, and from a right to an abuse. Instead of reclaiming its previous dignity after the loss became obvious, the school surrendered the last shreds of self-esteem still clinging to it. The school administration, the teachers, even the custodial staff are hostages

to the belief that by making themselves virtual servants of the children, they will eventually be appreciated and school buildings will certainly, if only at long last, become temples of harmony. This has been proved false by years of experience, but the theorists, rather than admit defeat, advocate giving even more prerogatives to the students. High-school students are not mature enough to undertake the responsibilities of running a school. Besides, they do not want to run the school—only the teachers. This frequently happens, since they are quite aware of their power in being able to report you to a superior. It is a great trick, in a dispute over a mark or a disciplinary problem, after argument has failed to get the mark changed or the discipline card retracted, for a student to announce that he is going straight to the principal—not to pledge his future improvement, but to report your present misconduct. The tirade ends with the words, "I got my rights."

This new methodology has raised a breed of child afraid of no one, awed by no rule or regulation. They know that courses are planned and diplomas accredited solely on the basis of pupil interest. They know that they no longer have to take and pass New York State Regents Examinations in order to graduate. School has been given to them to do with as they will; it has become their toy, and they cannot understand a teacher's refusal to let them play with it. For example:

I once failed a student for the term. I failed him because his final test, which had been announced two weeks previously, was handed in perfectly blank except for his name at the top. The boy was not ill on that day; while the other children worked, he spent the entire period staring out the window, rolling a toothpick around in his mouth. He knew what the others were doing and had heard my reminder on

the previous day that this was to be the final test. Weight was added to my words by the fact that this was the spring term, and if a class were failed now it would have to be made up in summer school. Nevertheless, he turned the blank paper in to me. His other marks for his term's work and his consistent lack of interest alone were sufficient for term failure; the lack of a final test mark simply decided the matter.

He immediately exploded into my room.

"Ya failed me!"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"Because you didn't write a thing on the final exam. Because you still owe me a book report, two months overdue. Because you paid absolutely no attention all term. How could I pass you?"

"Look, I'll bring in the book report tomorrow."

"How are you going to read a book and write a report in one night? You know I won't take a report on a *Classic Comic*."

"Gimme a chance. Ya gonna fail me for one crummy book report? What a class! I din' do no book reports las' term and she gave me a seventy. Whatsa matter with you?"

"Nothing. What's your excuse?"

"Excuse? Whaddya mean excuse? You won' be fair wit' me."

"Where's the question of fairness involved here? I *am* fair. You did nothing all term, you wrote nothing on the test, you said nothing all term. You failed. It's quite fair and quite simple."

"No, it ain't."

"What possible reason can you have for even expecting to pass?"

"I come to class. I wuz quiet."

"A little too quiet."

"What a teacher. I came to class, I be quiet, an she don' pass me."

"When did I ever make a deal with you? Did I ever say that if you were quiet, I would pass you? Answer me."

"Naa."

"All right, then. You failed and that's that."

"You're not fair."

"Listen, Martin. Don't you dare try to put me on the defensive. Defend yourself; you're the one who failed, not I. What possible reason can you have for not even *trying* to pass the test? Suppose you were the teacher. What would you think if someone in your class gave you a blank test paper? Would you think he's so smart he doesn't have to put anything down? Wouldn't you think instead that he just didn't know anything?"

"Let me take the test tomorrow. I'll take it then."

"Why do you deserve special treatment? If I let you take the test again, I'd have to let everyone else take it again, too."

"Why? Jus' me. O.K., Miss Dunn?"

"No. You don't deserve it. Yon knew about the test. You chose to fail. It would not be fair to the class to do this for you. And, it would not be fair to you, my friend."

"I don' care. Be unfair to me."

"Not on your life. You've got a big enough something-for-nothing complex right now. Why should I help to make it gigantic?"

"So what difference does it make to you if I pass or fail?"

"More than you know, child, more than you know."

"Ya gonna help me by failing me?"

"It depends ou how you take it."

"I ain' gonna take it. I'll tell you that. I'm gonna go see the grade adviser."

"That's your privilege. But I'm telling you right now, Martin, I am not going to change that mark. You can bring up your mother, your grandfather—you can bring up the mayor. It won't make any difference at all. The mark stands. You failed and you *know* very well you deserved to."

"I'll go see the principal."

"Go right ahead."

"You can't do this to me."

"I already have."

I don't know whether he ever reached the principal, but he got to the grade adviser and the assistant principal, and when I was called to the office to explain, I went through the whole story again. It was obvious that the boy was not out to malign (as some are); he would have settled for intimidation. I saw him a few times after that; he would not answer when I greeted him, and he looked upon me, I am sure, as a personal enemy. He had probably boasted to his friends that I would pass him anyway, and his *amour-propre* had suffered considerable damage.

Sometimes a child announced to you after a set-to of this sort, "I don' wanna be in your class no more." This was delivered with a finality that plainly implied you were the loser. Nor were their left-handed compliments reserved for their departures. One term I was awaiting the arrival of a class. Suddenly, at the door appeared a boy whom I had had the misfortune to meet the previous term in Study Hall. We had had a few memorable differences of opinion. He peered in anxiously, saw me. Clapping a hand to his forehead, he moaned, "Nooo!" After he was finally prevailed upon to enter the room, he decided that discretion

was the better part of valor, and looking up archly from under his brows, he asked, "Remember me?" I groaned silently. We were off on a flying start.

The classic story, however, in this regard concerns a startling young woman who arrived one portentous September day from junior high school, and by the fifteenth of that month had assured every teacher on the faculty that she was a genius and had adopted a patronizing attitude toward all teachers "over twenty-five." She frequently mentioned this to me to let me know that in my case there was still hope. For well-founded reasons, she was not recommended for the honor society when she applied for it a few terms later. Nothing daunted, and in a towering rage, our girl reported all her teachers to the grade adviser, and getting no satisfaction from that quarter, promptly reported her to the principal. Finding in the principal no sympathetic listener, she reported him to his assistant. She finally emerged, upset and defeated, from her closed circle of related reportage and firmly announced that *they* did not matter anyway, *she* was going to write her autobiography, and then the world would learn what injustice was.

"Experiences, Anyone?"

I think that the learning process advocated and enforced by any civilization epitomizes its attitude toward youth, for the future lives in the child; in him dwell society's infused values—the truth that must be tested, the hopes to be fulfilled. Humanity bears the imprint of the militarism of the Spartans, to whom youth was a warrior, the single-mindedness of medieval doctors, to whom youth was a child of God, the urbanity of the Erasmians, to whom youth was a citizen of the world.

How does our civilization, acting through its educators, regard youth? Look around you in the subways, the busses, the movie lobbies. Walk through Times Square on a Saturday night. The straight backs of would-be soldiers, the chastened gaze of young theologians, are not in evidence in such places. Another ideal is represented there. What you see and hear around you is the conclusion of the premise that youth is a perfected state, an empyreal condition. Current pedagogical philosophy affirms that teachers can do no more than hint at the wealth of youth's cultural inheritance, and if shy references provoke no interest, it is the teachers who must adjust their interests, revise their questions. All that a teacher might know about science, language, or literature must be squeezed into the narrow confines of an adolescent life. If it does not fit, the life is not to be expanded, but the culture is to be contracted. If a high-school boy prefers the pool hall to Plato, then the philosopher must hide behind the cues.

Classical subject matter must be made "meaningful," and the resulting hodgepodge of the old and the new must be translated into teachable units by the children, with their scant interests and petty prejudices.

"Why bother to improve their speech?" queried one teacher at a faculty meeting. "They understand one another."

A corollary might be that teachers should learn the students' language—vocabulary, syntax, and all.

Ostensibly, the teacher draws on the children's backgrounds, their experiences (!), their whims and preferences, to find links between their lives and what he wants to teach. No link, no lesson. Do not attempt to dominate the children by presenting them with planned lessons. Do not force the child to do what he does not want to do. Do

not reprimand him. Do not raise your voice; keep smiling. But this is a crucial question: Does the teacher plan the lessons or do the students? I believe it is better to have one leader and forty followers; I believe further that it is unnatural for a teacher to be a follower.

This arty and contrived preoccupation with form to the exclusion of matter, with planning to the loss of plan, has unusual effects. I once heard a teacher boast that he had conducted an electrifying lesson during which his class had decided that Abraham Lincoln was a dictator. I imagined the verbal fireworks—the teacher probably linking the Great Emancipator with Hitler and racing breathlessly back across the Atlantic to arrive at Ford's Theater just as Booth purged the bitter and divided country of its hated tyrant.

He told everyone who would listen about his brilliant and provocative teaching. It might be true of his method, but what of his matter? This shameful desire to cater to ignorant tastes, purveying sensational fictions to unformed minds, telling them what they want to be told, condoning their worst impulses, excusing their excesses—all this is implicit in the dominant educational philosophy. With such a guide, the term's work is shaped to the students' limitations and hostage to their ignorance.

I tried to teach my classes interestingly since I never believed that teaching had to be boring in order to be effective. Lively classes were more fun for everyone; we shared the work and the pleasantries. But I did not feel that it was necessary to consult my students about the term's work. Occasionally, I attempted it with an honor class, because they were alert and interested and nearly adults in the breadth of their interests, but with average or G classes it was a different case entirely.

In the first place, such children did not expect to be asked

what they wanted to do. It annoyed and embarrassed them. With good but not-too-bright youngsters, it took a ponderously long time to get just a few suggestions from them, and then even longer to get them to come to a decision. They never saw merit in anyone else's suggestions. Once in a while, I would ask a class what kind of book they wanted to read for the next book report, and invariably the breakdown would be a sports story for the boys and a love story for the girls. They never showed the slightest deviation from the pattern, nor were they even faintly aware that there were other people in the world besides baseball players and movie stars. If an idea did not emerge from the hallowed precincts of the ball park or film studio, it was not worth considering. It always amused me to hear about a movie that was "real good, Miss Dunn, ya oughta see it." Watching their faces, I said I knew the story.

"But ya said ya didn' see this here show."

"I didn't. I read the book."

"This here's a book?"

"Certainly."

"Yeah?"

You could hear their illusions shattering. Their idea was that a good story like *The Red Badge of Courage* was conceived by a scriptwriter, was made into an extravaganza utilizing every extra within commuting distance of the studio, was adapted into a *Classic Comic*, and ultimately declined from these illustrious beginnings into the dubious status of literature. That it had been a book first was unbearable. The greatest impression, however, was made by the rash of movies on biblical themes to which we have lately been subjected. Respect for that honored chronicle has risen appreciably among American youth since Hollywood saw fit to dignify a few of its minor episodes with

the master touch. And if I ever mentioned that the Bible was still the world's best seller, heads nodded knowingly, occupied with visions of California's Samson and Delilah.

But, I reasoned, if a comparatively simple decision like choosing a book to read for a book report caused such displays of indecision and such affirmations of loyalty to sport and cinema, why waste more time in bootless discussions about the curriculum? Besides, I thought that organizing the curriculum was one of the things I was being paid to do. I doled out equal parts of grammar, writing, reading, reporting, and discussing. It worked with average classes, willing to meet me part of the way. It did not work with the G classes.

The G classes were composed of boys and girls who, on the recommendation of their last teacher, had been classed as "slow learners," needing a more leisurely pace in learning and specialized help. It looked good on paper. Sociologists and educators pointed with pride to the great numbers of potential juvenile delinquents who had been saved from the streets and who were being given an education suited to and based upon their "needs, interests, and abilities." But they had not been saved from the streets; they had simply brought the streets into the classroom. For, like so many theories, this one does not work out in practice. G classes are composed of all the discipline cases in the school, with an occasional child who might benefit from a program of this kind. The G class is used as a threat by teachers who punish students by programming them for a modified course, and as a refuge by students who do not wish to do regular work. They accomplish this fraud by failing to do any work in a regular class or by making a deal with a teacher, agreeing to be fairly well behaved during the term, in return for which favor the teacher must

put them into a G class the following term. And just as the same students keep showing up in the G classes, the same teachers show up to teach them. This is because some teachers can handle these classes and some cannot. Little official credence is given to the fact that the teachers who can handle the G classes do so because they are not willing to let the classes run them. Consequently, the burden is shifted to the fraction of teachers—8 out of 160, according to one administrator—who have done something constructive with these classes in the past and who therefore can look forward to many more of the same in the future. The injustice of this is patent, but it is a recognized system that is not likely to be altered. The teacher who struggles with these classes is given credit by no one, save an occasional supervisor. His colleagues think he is a fool for not taking the easy way out and the kids think he is a battle-ax because he is always yelling. In addition, the tension and acute strain to the teacher, physically and emotionally, is appalling. There are no reports, awards, or votes of appreciation for teachers who are forced to put up with this situation term after term, year after year. And no one actually involved in a G class—student, parent, or teacher—has a good word to say for them. One mother complained bitterly to the dean: "Don't put my boy in a G class. They're no good. That's where I met his father."

It is no wonder that student planning in a G class is a sight to behold. One G class of twenty-nine caused me more work, more planning, more anxiety than my four other classes put together. How could anyone plan with a class like this? They brought their comic books to class every day. In the beginning, they talked and argued among themselves, roamed around the room at will, stood gazing out the window, and darted in and out of the room whenever

"When we get out for Christmas vacation?"

"What time is it?"

"When this class over?"

"Can I leave the room?"

"Pass?"

"Shut up, Louie. The teacher readin."

"Shut up yourself."

"Shut up, botha yez. I wanna sleep."

"All right, gentlemen, quiet."

This was only one class out of five. I lost my voice at least three times during the term; my eyesight weakened, and I was plagued by colds. At the end of the term, I was ready for a six months' leave for restoration of health. But I did learn something interesting from this class and many others of the same type that it was my job to teach. I learned that it was impossible to build any kind of lesson on their interests because their interests are too few, on their likes because their likes are too shocking, on their dislikes because then you would spend a term justifying parents, teachers, schools, police, and authority in general. I found them interested in three things: sex, noise, and violence, in that order. The only thing capable of holding their interest for an appreciable amount of time would be a combination of all three. But how can a teacher compete with the movies and TV, where they get it all together and in quantity?

They were fascinated by stories of great fires, bombings, destructions, upheavals, earthquakes, and gruesome tortures. They cared less that Lincoln was assassinated than that he was shot from behind and the murderer fled, stabbed in many places, in a trail of blood. Shakespeare was a bore, but London with its bear-baiting and its barbaric hangings quickened their pulses. If I taught them according to their

interests, their spelling lists would only include words like murder, robbery, and rape. Their introduction to literature and reading would number only recitals of atrocities and the overthrow of authority, for they dearly loved to see or hear of authority being circumvented. The more legitimate the authority, the more genuine their enjoyment.

Such children are interested in nothing that does not touch their own lives or those of their friends and relatives. War is to them a real thing because brothers or friends have fought in it. They know they will soon be drafted themselves. Hard physical labor they know, because some of their fathers are laborers and they themselves work after school and on weekends. Hunger may be familiar if they happen to have seen it right around them. They understand jealousy, love, hate, lust, gratitude—the immediate emotions. They know their own neighborhood, and maybe a few other places to which they are drawn by business or pleasure, but the world and its immensity mean nothing to them. They do not fret over their lack. It is they who have lived, they think, not we. Should you patronize them, their pity turns to scorn. The U.N., the atom bomb, the greater issues in politics, national or international—all those topics that so many teachers stress to the exclusion of all else—have little meaning for them. Nor are they receptive to new ideas, the only exceptions being the realms of dress and entertainment. A youngster trained, and quite satisfied, in this close tradition would be humiliated to admit he had not a pair of custom-made "pistol pants," complete with plastic belt and leopard trim, or a television set. His inability to speak his language is not a problem. The fact that he cannot read, and will not learn, guarantees him against any future schooling. He would not change his status for the world. He runs the school, and he knows it.

The only thing he respects is the force of a will stronger than his own. It is impossible to plan anything with children of this kind.

One spring term, after I had been teaching about a year, I was given a G class that nearly wrapped up my teaching career then and there. This was a class of about thirty-two, again mostly boys, and because of my inexperience, nearly impossible to teach. They were foul-mouthed and insolent, knowledgeable beyond their years, and they looked on school as a necessary evil. They tolerated me with all the aplomb of veterans who had seen many teachers crack under the combined weight of their scorn and nuisance value.

I was given poetry to teach them. Here again, they would listen to me read, and here again I was forced to do what would keep them orderly. Strangely enough, they rather liked some of the poems, the dialect ones of T. A. Daly, for example. They liked sentiment laid on with a lavish hand, and they reveled, briefly, in bathos. It was inevitable that the Daly poems would run out, and I certainly couldn't keep reading the same ones day after day. Need I say that I got nowhere with "Dover Beach"?

It must have been about this time that I said something was like a TV serial. That did it. They must have decided that since I presumed to be a teacher, I must know all about television. After all, that was the most important thing in the world. Here, they seemed to say, was my chance to redeem myself after all this nonsensical talk about poetry and words and sentences and writing.

"What about pitcha?"

"Pardon me?"

"The pitcha, howzit get dere?"

This inquisitive youth was the ringleader. As he spoke his native dialect, the class listened silently. I decided it was worth a try. I drew wild illustrations on the board of hills and mountains and towers and wires and wave lengths and got the whole thing all wrong. But it was worth it to see the face of the class bully go slack-jawed with interest.

Like any great phenomenon of nature, it was to be seen once and never again. They were rapt until the bell rang, and I naturally thought that I had hit upon a good thing. I went home that night and rooted out all I could find about the mechanical mysteries of TV. I returned to school, armed with notes and answers to imaginary questions, feeling that here, at last, was common ground, and that any time the English paled, which promised to be frequently, I could, perhaps, work the lesson around to TV. But they seemed to have forgotten all about it. When I next mentioned it, they continued to look at me listlessly, waiting for the bell to ring, and I knew that somehow the set had lost its magic powers. The *coup de grâce* was administered shortly thereafter when one of them asked if I had seen something Milton Berle had done on his last show. I was trapped. When I said I hadn't seen the show because I didn't have a television set, the silence was deafening. I could see on their faces that I was not to be taken seriously again.

This experience taught me something else. The new learning process is doomed to failure because even when the teacher is prepared to co-operate, the kids are not really interested in what they think they're interested in. And no teacher can beat that.

However, the mob and I parted company on equitable terms. The last day of class saw a boy who had caused me

nothing but trouble all term shuffle up to my desk and deposit thereon his shop project, a pair of bookends shaped like horses' heads.

"Here's a present for ya."

"Albert, I hope this isn't a bribe."

"Waaa?"

"You're not trying to trade the bookends for a sixty-five?"

"Naaa."

"Well, I certainly appreciate the gesture. But why don't you give them to your mother? I'm sure she'd like to have them."

"Naaa," boasted Albert, convinced of the wisdom of his own inherited learning process, "she don' read."

"We Don't Teach the Subject, We Teach the Child."

Actions speak louder than words, and in our day youth speaks louder than anything. Youth is everywhere in evidence and always in earshot. Youth demands, judges, rejects, and one does not have to be a teacher to know this. One learns it intimately as a parent—or as an aunt or uncle. Even the childless citizen is becoming aware of the nature of our youth. The most incredulous and uninterested among us must pause as he reads his newspaper or magazine. Not only does the recalcitrant adolescent dislike his school, but he sets fire to it, burns its books, scrawls obscenities all over the walls and desks. The hatred of many for school and the dedication of their leisure time to its wanton destruction are merely instances of their general disrespect for authority in any form—parental, scholastic, or legal. Should they run afoul of authority, it is a minor matter. Then they

have the opportunity to defy it openly and make themselves heroes—twentieth-century heroes.

The ordinary citizen gets his impressions of the American adolescent from the papers and the magazines, but chiefly by sight. Or he hears them, even if he sees them not, howling in the city streets at night. The situation is bad enough to force people who have no responsibility for the governance of young people to scold them. It is rarely that the ones to whom the reproof is directed will listen to it. Even those who have a duty to correct the young are slightly treated. Once, when I was teaching, I severely berated one boy for tripping another as he came down the aisle. I explained the danger of hitting one's head on the metal desk struts or knocking out a few teeth.

"Why ya gettin so excited? I didn' trip you."

"I'm responsible for all of you when you're in this room. Frightening, isn't it?"

"So what? Ya gettin paid for it."

Only recently, I was traveling in the subway from New York City to Brooklyn. The car was half empty. When the train pulled into Thirty-fourth Street, four or five boys, aged about ten or eleven, stormed into the car. They lunged for the seats in the rear, which they soon preempted by making so much racket that people already seated were forced to move. Soon they were sprawled all over the seats, feet up on the window sill, and indulging in that insane, high-pitched laughter that is characteristic of children when they know they are doing something wrong and are the center of attention because of it. The shuffling and pushing soon paled, however. They started a game to see who could spit farthest along the aisle. This was proceeding gaily when a man who had been watching the whole thing went over to them and asked them to stop.

He started by calling them "Sonny" in a benevolent tone, but ended by herding the whole crew off at the next stop to be handed over to the transit policeman.

This incident in the train is related to situations in the schools. Why does a child or young adult today go into a public place and make a nuisance of himself? Why are adolescents so scornful of authority? Why is the American adolescent such a pest? Could it be because authority has been turned over to him, because he has been told he's right when he *knows* he's wrong? Authority has been weakened in two of the most important influences in the child's formation: family and school. Let us consider here the school's share in this startling situation.

The school has decided to concentrate on teaching "the whole child." But the system does not work. Everyone knows it. Everyone admits it except the influential people who support it. The teacher knows it because she sees kids in school riding herd on the administration and the faculty. The parent knows it when his twelve-year-old son tells him exactly where to head in. The policeman knows it when he books a gang of young thugs for killing a member of a rival gang. The social worker knows it when she finds a thirteen-year-old girl wandering around Times Square, a drug addict. Building custodians know it when they have to repair seventy-five windowpanes a week. Personnel workers know it when the job applicant can neither spell nor write legibly. Bus drivers know it when well-integrated high-school children riot in the bus and slash the seat cushions. The man in the street knows all about it when he is pushed off the sidewalk by a gang of boisterous teen-agers, the boys loping along, bands stuffed in pockets, and the painted girls, their hair set in hundreds of tiny pin curls, crooning the current jukebox favorite.

We all know them, don't we? We have seen them on the streets, or seen their pictures in the paper, being booked for robbery, assault, or murder. And these pitiful spectacles are, according to some educators, judges, and parents, evidences of educational progress. Some extremists even say that these children are victims, not of the system of education that refused to teach them the difference between right and wrong, but of the laws, which are too strict and should be modified to fit "our changing social pattern." Is this, then, the best result we can hope for from the practice of the theory, "Teach the child, not the subject"? No, it is not the best, but it is the most frequent. The minority of students who benefit from this theory do not balance the great damage that is being done by it. Yet it is allowed to persist in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. Some educational theorists never admit they are wrong, even when they are proved wrong. They sit firmly entrenched in their ivory towers, citing the same hackneyed arguments for the progressive theory despite the fact that for every case of damage attributable to old-fashioned methods there are ten cases of violence and lawlessness attributable to the new.

There is a great compulsion to toss formal learning out of the window in favor of a vague formula for turning out enthusiastic, civic-minded, well-integrated, unrepressed graduates. But the formula is unsuccessful and dangerous. The compulsion springs from a dissatisfaction with the past, for any one of a number of personal or historical reasons. Whatever the individual reason may be, it is common for the devotees of the new system to be oriented toward the future, but in a way that considers the future as separate from the past. They do not look on teaching as the mission of passing on our cultural heritage. Their dissatisfaction

turns into oblivion, and some think—and teach—that history started in 1917. This dissatisfaction and this oblivion are fed by a pride and a fallacy. Pride makes these people believe that no one has ever taught as well as they teach, no one was ever as interested in children as they are, and no one who does not believe as they believe can possibly be a good teacher. The fallacy supposes that all the ills of the world, from race prejudice to poor sanitation, proceed from the lack of a certain kind of education. They believe, sincerely, I think, that materialistic education will bring about social welfare, and they anticipate the millennium when dirt, despair, and disease will vanish in a great glow of practical learning. They want very much to get everybody into school, and when they succeed in doing just that, they are at a loss to know what to do with the students. The evidence of their own senses tells them that it does not work. So they call for bigger schools, better teachers, more desks, and more vitamins in the lunches. They blame everything but their formula.

The inescapable goal of their reasoning is to drop from the already depleted curriculum any subject not directly concerned with their aim, i.e., the alleviation of all the world's ills through practical education. For instance, they decide, Latin is obviously not to our purpose. Latin must go. And Latin goes. Markham bemoaned the worker's loss of the "swing of Pleiades." Little did he know that someday education philosophy would advocate only what is practically and immediately useful, and that his man would be encouraged to grasp his hoe forever, no matter how longingly he might search the skies—for his hoe is "meaningful"; with his hoe he can earn a living. That is the prime concern of most education today. Perhaps a present-day Markham would vent his wrath not on those who deny men access to

beauty but on those who deprecate his yearning for beauty because it is financially unrewarding.

And now on to the formula itself. How does one go about "teaching the whole child?" Well, the first thing you do is scrap the practice of teaching English for forty minutes, science for forty minutes, mathematics for forty minutes, and so on. You operate on the premise that it is far more important for the child to become well integrated, emotionally secure, at peace, and useful to his neighbors. You feel that he should be taught these things first; the others (the English, the mathematics) are secondary and at any rate will be picked up as we go along. These worthy aims are fulfilled through discussions with the child and by developing and fostering the child's means of expression—oral and written. The child is called upon to discuss, to bring up as a topic for group discussion, anything that interests or troubles him. It is an extended game of "True Confessions."

When a topic is introduced, all the pupils have a right to express their opinions in the matter, and then a conclusion is reached, usually by vote. Ostensibly, the individual child will abide by the decision of the class and act accordingly. And, say the progressives, the better the teacher, the less will his presence be felt during this whole procedure. He is allowed to make suggestions—to "hint"—but never to conclude or force his decision on the class. The idea is to "discuss" interminably—discussion is supposed to be training in the democratic process. Amid all the chatter about how to be popular on a date, any little word you can throw in about the value of emotional security will be greatly appreciated by the class. They will realize in the same vague manner in which you teach that here is a teacher worthy to be called a teacher. They will know you not as

the crochety old harridan who raved about composition but as the vital, alert, forward-looking "guide" who first coaxed them along the long road to "adjustment." I think they will remember you as an old fraud.

Teaching has always meant one thing—the transfer of knowledge from you and through you to others who lack it. There must be subject matter; there must be a logical progression of learning to satisfy teacher and class that subject matter is being presented, worked on, and eventually mastered. It matters not how fascinating a teacher may think he is—he cannot chat and fool with a class for six months and call it teaching. It is, at best, a good way to waste time, and at worst (its common form), it is chaos. There are very few fascinating teachers. Those who are, are born so in the first instance, and develop their potentialities through hard work in mastering their subject and enriching their presentation of it. Some who claim to teach by means of vital discussions of current affairs are such dismal conversationalists that to be trapped at a lunch table with them is sufficient to ruin your digestion. This is not teaching, and the children are the first to realize it. They are too young to understand the value of conversation, even if it should be good conversation—a rare experience in a public high school. They cannot contribute enough on a worth-while subject to make a dialogue, and so it becomes a monologue on any passing fancy of the teacher's. That is what happens if the teacher is a good disciplinarian. If he is a weak one, by nature or by choice, his classes resent him and take advantage of him. He becomes the captive audience and is consulted only when it is absolutely necessary—say, to sign a pass. The bright ones take advantage of him, the tough ones terrorize him, and the dull ones do not have the faintest idea of what is going on.

The whole child cannot be taught anything that is at all worth while, anything that will fit him to be a good citizen, get along with others, and make a decent living for himself, when the whole theory is based on the premise that competition is wrong. They believe it is disgraceful, unhealthy, and false to set one child in competition with another. They argue that a child should be trained to compete against himself, a worthy idea but one that presupposes a certain maturity, an awareness of future aims, that a high-school student simply does not have. It is found, if at all, on the college or university level, and, ironically enough, only when the individual still learning begins to realize the keenness of the competitive world around him and buckles down to hard work and consistent effort. This idea, to be practical at all, also needs the support of economic security. What is the value of advocating noncompetition to a child who comes from a working-class family and who is bound to learn quite early in the game about the difficulty of making a living? Why not admit the fact that we live in a highly competitive world and go on from there? The child knows it; he sees it all around him. Where would typical American industries like advertising be without the competitive idea? Why say competition is wrong and then point with pride to the well-salaried account executive whose job it is to think up new ideas to compete with other products?

The no-competition fixation is further manifested in the elementary-school practice of promoting *all* the children, regardless of their scholastic progress or lack of it. The child must be kept with his age group. He will then be happy and secure, and soon the teacher will witness the budding of self-competition. He will clamor to learn, will be avid to make up all he has lost. When he sees how good the school

has been to him by keeping him in the same class with all his friends, his gratitude will know no bounds.

This is the way it is practiced in high school:

"Paul, see me after class, please."

"Whaffor?"

"I'll speak to you after class."

"O.K."

In the four or so minutes between classes, I make an attempt at a heart-to-heart talk with my listless scholar.

"Now, Paul, I'm afraid you're not going to pass this term unless you get busy and do a little work."

"Whaddya mean? I'm quiet."

"Yes. You do behave, but you need to do more than that to pass. You need to do book reports and homework, and answer questions occasionally. Things I can mark, make an average. Just something to show that you're interested in getting out of second-term English."

"I ain' gonna read no books. No, sir."

"That's your final word on the subject?"

"It sure is."

"All right. No work, no pass. You stay in second term."

"Whaddya mean I stay here? There ain't gonna be no second-term classes next term. I betcha I'll be in your class again!"

He was—in third term. Need I go into detail about the shattering effect this has on a teacher's authority, successfully destroying in one fell swoop all the inducements and small successes that had taken months to mold into even slight progress for this boy, something that he could honestly take pride in as the result of his own efforts? But there is a less apparent and infinitely more important danger: fostering in the students' minds the belief that there is no punishment for failure. The inaccurate notion that effort

and the lack of it receive the same reward is certainly no inducement to the lax to work a little harder and no incentive to the more intelligent to strive for higher things. The dull children and the discipline problems continue to do nothing and get rewarded for it, and the bright do less and get good marks.

But one of the most questionable ideas ever attributed to an adult mind is the marking system currently in force in New York City public schools. The system is this: The teacher must mark a student's term work (the children get three marks each term) only in units of five in grades from 65 to 90. From 90 to 100, you can mark in units of one. There is nothing remarkable about the passing marks, unless it is that most students today are overmarked because of the lowering of scholastic standards. It is in the realm of the failure that our educational psychologists outdo themselves. All concerned must act as if the failure were an oversight on the student's part. This failing nonsense, the script reads, would be promptly forgotten if he would, please, just exert himself ever so slightly because it is all really such fun and look how happy Sam is because he passed and can stay with his friends or maybe he would like to be transferred to Miss Adam's class because she is sure to "understand" him and, besides, and most important, we must have 100 per cent passing on our report, because it is on paper that good teaching is assessed, not in the classroom. He is not always given the mark he earned, and this is why. The people responsible for this idea have decided that the higher the failing mark, the harder the student will work to pass. But haven't the good professors averted their gaze from a few nasty truths? Firstly, the failing child knows he can go ahead in certain subjects regardless of failure. Secondly, the failure doesn't understand

why he got a higher failing mark than he knows he deserves. Thirdly, most failing students in schools today could not care less whether they pass or fail.

Here is a more detailed picture of the marking system at work. There is a student in your third-term English class—not lavishly endowed with gray matter, but even the modest share he claims is atrophied from disuse. This boy—let's call him Roger—is fresh out of junior high, where he has had a fine time, and he has come along to high school in confident expectation of more of the same. But you keep talking about work; you even insist he take a textbook. He takes it—home, where it stays until the last day of class when he must hand it in or pay for it. You puzzle him—work in an English class? Where are the outings of yesteryear? The discussions? The forums? He decides that you are "crazy" and settles down for the term. He tilts his chair against the rear wall, gazing sleepily at you and the rest of the class from under half-lowered lids, drumming incessantly on the slanting desk with fingers, pencil, or knife. He thinks he is a "good kid"; he thoroughly expects to pass. You take a different view and at various times during the term you acquaint him with the schedule of work expected of him. He is first amazed, then he mellows to a delaying action and agrees wholeheartedly with your requests, beating out his secret rhythms all the while. But you never get the work. He is fairly sure you will forget all about it. You don't. He gets 60 on his report card for the first two marking periods of the term to show him and any superior who might check over your record that he could pass if he really tried. For 60 is a code mark to mean just that, he is a borderline case and a high failing mark will encourage him to do better. The theory is that when he sees his report card, he will sulk for

a while and then emerge, a sadder but wiser being. Here is the joke. Roger knows he is actually worth about 12 credits for the third. When he sees that he received 60 for the marking period—the 60 he is given for the 12 he knows he's worth—he storms up to your desk with the outraged plea, "You couldn't give me five more credits? Some teacher you are."

What kind of a "whole child" has been nurtured by this engendering of the attitudes of something-for-nothing and reward for failure? We raise children like those I saw one Thursday night at 6:30 P.M. at Fiftieth Street and Broadway. The narrow block between Sixth and Seventh Avenues was choked with hundreds of high- and elementary-school students who had just been released from Madison Square Garden. (I later learned that there was a high-school basketball game there that afternoon.) They surged back and forth across the street, tossing basketballs, treading on people's feet, pushing one another into the gutter. They were in a riotous fervor, screaming obscenities—I thought for a moment that I was back in school. There were young ones of ten or eleven years old and older ones of eighteen and nineteen. All were in the same stampede, even the bold-faced girls who swung along the street four and five together, forcing off the pavement the people coming from the opposite direction. A trio of them were jumping up and down in the center of a circle of admirers, chanting, "Act like ladies, act like ladies" in hysterically pitched voices. Why shouldn't they smash plate-glass windows, rip up the subway cushions on the way home, and spew vulgarities at passers-by? They had been taught in many ways that their actions carried no responsibility. Why not guffaw over the advice given them by an anxious teacher? The teacher has no status in their lives; they know

that his threats are ineffectual, so why listen to his advice? The whole child here was not even human. He was an animal and I turned my head from him in shame, just as I had inevitably to turn from the system that had such a large share in forming him.

5. THE BRASS TACKS

IT WAS inevitable (and desirable) that I should know some students well, for many of them showed up in my classes term after term. I knew them and liked them, and they liked me. They gave me cartons of cigarettes, scarves, gloves—and lots of advice, sometimes startling, always sincere. My students advised me, I think, because I was relatively young, and with the free-and-easy attitude today affected by youth toward its elders, the advice was always easy to give. I cannot conceive of myself at their age suggesting to a teacher that she change her hair-do, or commenting, even favorably, on her wardrobe; and if they felt free to comment on externals, they also were moved, upon occasion, to proceed to more important matters. Such serious advice was always delivered with wonder or urgency.

"How do you stand it?"

"Miss Dunn, why don'tcha' get outa here? You're smart. You could be a sekkatery." These are the things I remember with a glow. They are about the best compliments a teacher today can expect, for, with many students, advice to teachers takes the form of two heartfelt words: "Drop dead." (It seems incredible, I know. But that *is* the way some children talk to their teachers.)

As I got to know these kids, I began to wonder about

their homes. Did they break windows at home, shout at the old man, sass their mothers? Did they scrawl dirty words on the living-room wall and carve initials, hearts, and muscle-bound supermen on the tables? Did they heave their food at one another at home as they did in the school cafeteria? Were they at home, as they were in school, one hoarse unit of noise? Were their parents treated in the same offhand fashion as their teachers? Did they stub cigarette butts on the cushions of the family car as they were wont to do in the school bus? It was the child-home, child-school relationship that concerned me. Obviously, there were good homes; any child who retained sanity, and sometimes even sweetness, of behavior in the high-voltage atmosphere of the school must come from a home where good patterns of behavior were instilled and insisted upon. But, I used to wonder, are there as many bad homes as there are bad children? Is there a wild streak in all of these families? Do they point with pride to their young delinquent?

I think not, even though the link between home and school is such a strong one. Admittedly, the home is the strongest influence on the child, but some schools today are in such desperate shape that they can take a good child and corrupt him. The school today can serve to infect the family. If the children did not come to us bad, then we shared the blame for letting them become bad. But more of that later.

Let us go back to the first idea, that the home is, as it should be, the predominating influence on the child. It is natural that the family, the basic unit of society and civilization, should care for its children and not just limit itself to providing food, clothing, and shelter. This protection even includes learning. The baby imitates the words

he hears as the child voices the opinions he hears. It is under the care and shadow of the family that the child should begin to grow and to exhibit the first signs of individuality, and it is the mother and the father of the child who bear the awful responsibility of forming him, of setting him a good example. It is their privilege to be their child's first teachers. It is they who give the child his first ideas of right and wrong, who set the pattern of reward and punishment. They fail as parents who do not do this, and they bear the first and final responsibility for such failure. There are no extenuating circumstances for allowing children to grow like weeds, with no pruning.

Parents must love, as well as train, their child, imparting an early sense of security in love that is essential to a normal childhood, and that no nurse, no governess, no social worker, no teacher can give. They cannot give it and should not be expected to give it. A child should know love in his home whether that place is poor or luxurious and whether his parents are intelligent or stupid, handsome or ugly. He must have it even if his mother works. And it can be done. Of course, it is twice as hard for parents to train children well with the added burden of serious financial need or other problems, but the harder they work the greater will be their joy in their children when they see the result. My mother worked from the time my brother and I were children until we were graduated from college. We know now how hard it was for her to be mother, father, wage-earner all in one, but she did it, and she knew at all times where we were, with whom, and why. We, on our part, learned to take care of ourselves, fix our lunch at noon, and help around the house. But we also did our homework and had time for friends. It was hard for us as well as for our mother, but it could be done—and if it was done

then, and before then by others in other and stricter circumstances, why can it not be done now? Why are parents excused so often and so frequently by authorities today? Why are kids excused for serious wrongdoing because the mother works, or because the rent was increased, or because mother and father were just not meant for each other? Does the fact that Mom and Dad are psychologically incompatible give one child license to hit another on the head with a baseball bat? Such conduct may indicate that the child's mother or father has had a difficult time attending to the family in the face of obstacles to peace, but it is still no excuse. It is still failure to fulfill a plain and inescapable duty on the part of one parent or both.

It is the home that is first in the care and training of the child, and he bears its stamp forever. He is sent to school only because all parents are not able or qualified to teach him important facts and skills. The school cannot and should not try to take on the functions, rights, and duties of the home by usurpation or absorption; no teacher is (nor should he be) sufficiently interested in any child to become a parent to him. Indeed, the teacher could not even if he would—who could be a parent to two hundred students? Nevertheless, this is an idea in which there is great faith nowadays. I myself did not aspire to take the place of any child's mother; I just wanted to teach. But even that modest ambition was frequently unattainable because some parents had not done what they were supposed to do. Some parents expect the teacher to repair all the damage done by years of mishandling and omissions. We are all familiar with the mother who packs the kiddies off to the movies for a five-hour matinee every Saturday afternoon and looks forward to a quiet day herself. Similar relief is felt when the same kiddies are routed to school each morning, and joy knows

he hears as the child voices the opinions he hears. It is under the care and shadow of the family that the child should begin to grow and to exhibit the first signs of individuality, and it is the mother and the father of the child who bear the awful responsibility of forming him, of setting him a good example. It is their privilege to be their child's first teachers. It is they who give the child his first ideas of right and wrong, who set the pattern of reward and punishment. They fail as parents who do not do this, and they bear the first and final responsibility for such failure. There are no extenuating circumstances for allowing children to grow like weeds, with no pruning.

Parents must love, as well as train, their child, imparting an early sense of security in love that is essential to a normal childhood, and that no nurse, no governess, no social worker, no teacher can give. They cannot give it and should not be expected to give it. A child should know love in his home whether that place is poor or luxurious and whether his parents are intelligent or stupid, handsome or ugly. He must have it even if his mother works. And it can be done. Of course, it is twice as hard for parents to train children well with the added burden of serious financial need or other problems, but the harder they work the greater will be their joy in their children when they see the result. My mother worked from the time my brother and I were children until we were graduated from college. We know now how hard it was for her to be mother, father, wage-earner all in one, but she did it, and she knew at all times where we were, with whom, and why. We, on our part, learned to take care of ourselves, fix our lunch at noon, and help around the house. But we also did our homework and had time for friends. It was hard for us as well as for our mother, but it could be done—and if it was done

of seats. This was not my natural habitat, and it was understandable that some of the parents were confused. They had never seen me before and did not know that it was good Board of Education reasoning that an English teacher be assigned to a chemistry room. Hours went by. Finally, one rather harried woman approached, peered at me, and said questioningly:

"Mr. Holstein?"

"No," said I, "Miss Dunn."

"Well," she demanded, a little annoyed, "where can I find him?"

That was also the night the father of one of my best students questioned me closely on disciplinary procedure. It struck me that he was very knowing, and he later remarked a little ruefully, "I don't want her to get away with the things I did." These parents were interested in their children but there were far too many that could not even be found when the school had a serious reason for seeing them. And some parents went to fantastic lengths to excuse their children. In an interview with a parent about her child's lack of facility with French, the teacher said that if the child showed no improvement, he would fail for the term and might eventually have to drop the subject.

"Be kind," pleaded the mother. "It's not his fault. He was an eight months' baby."

Let us put the blame and the praise squarely where it belongs. The home is the primary, lasting mold of the child. It is in the circle of his family that he hears, sees, and absorbs the good things or the bad things—the charity or prejudice, the laughter or bad humor, the vindictiveness or magnanimity. Children understand, even at an early age, much more than they are given credit for. And the school can rarely change what the home has developed; no teacher

no bounds in September when school starts again. The parents who cannot cope with one or two children expect one teacher to cope with forty-five. They believe that this teacher should teach academic subjects, manners, ideals, and habits. But this is not the teacher's job. To permit teachers to do the best they can, children should come to them well mannered, well spoken, decently dressed, in normal health, and already aware of the difference between right and wrong. They should also be ready to learn and have a healthy respect for authority. If they do not come to school so prepared, they can barely be taught academic subjects, much less the other things the parents have neglected to instill. I once tried to explain to a class the reason for obeying teachers, regardless of their personal inclination. I reasoned that teachers stood *in loco parentis* to children in school and were entitled to the same respect and obedience that their parents received at home. They thought it was very funny—particularly the "*loco*" part.

Every once in a while, I found a little pamphlet in my mailbox at school telling, in purple prose, how wonderful it was that the school was becoming the center of the child's life. This did not please me, in spite of the fact that I saw all around me kids who were the way they were simply because their parents looked the other way while they grew up. How were we ever going to be home, playground, and clubroom as well as school? We were fast becoming so burdened with extra activities, so divided from our single purpose, that in our attempt to do too much we were in reality doing nothing.

It was always interesting to meet parents, and amusing to learn that some were just as unpredictable as their offspring. One term I was assigned to receive parents in a science room, with its array of apparatus and amphitheater

wilderment and sorrow of their parents, many of whom still had difficulty with English and so could not grasp the seriousness of the situation until it was too late and the damage was done. The answer is that the children learned their new ways in school—from teachers whose mission in life seems to be the destruction of all the old gods, from teachers who rattle on endlessly about the rights of youth, filling the young with a wholly false idea of their place in a normal society, from teachers who cheerfully resign all their prerogatives as elders and teachers and encourage children to run wild. They learn it from administrators who are afraid of them and from guidance experts and court officials who excuse their transgressions. Any fool can plainly see, it is said, that a child only spits down the stairwell because he has been repressed. The attitude is finally confirmed by other students who have got away with all sorts of things and who are only too eager to tell about it. For instance, they initiate the newcomer into the ways and means of securing and forging passes. They show him where he can smoke undetected and which are the best exits for leaving school illegally. He is taught the best way to annoy and shout down a teacher in class, just as he is told, with shrewdness and insight, just how much he can get away with in each teacher's class. He is briefed on all the standard answers if he should be caught doing something forbidden. He is instructed how to put off bringing his parents to school when he is requested to do so, and he learns how to confuse the truant officer. The influences that conspire, knowingly and otherwise, to demoralize the child are soon at work, and they are more powerful than any one person. These influences are teachers who turn everything, even discipline, over to the kids, who are only interested in their paychecks, and who are afraid of their

can change in forty-five shared minutes a day what a mother and father have done, by example or lack of it, for years. And again, no teacher should be expected to. This is usurping the rights and duties of the home and would make it easier for parents to shirk their responsibility. Some are too adept at it now. They must realize that the school, even with the best intentions, teachers, and facilities, is powerless unless it works in close conjunction with the home. It stands to reason that if there is nothing to work with in the home, no love, no interest, no awareness of the child as a feeling individual, the school cannot accomplish anything. Parents cannot put children who represent years of dissension, mistrust, and bitterness in the home, into ordinary, overcrowded, understaffed schools, and dump their responsibility there along with the child. They must look to themselves first, for criticism of the schools is justified only when previous responsibilities have been satisfied.

But what of those others, the ones that come from decent homes and are ruined in the school? This is the saddest case, for here are honest, hard-working parents striving to "do" for their children, who return to them after a few months in high-school, crass, flippant, and bored. Their attitude proclaims that they are answerable to no one, not even to their parents. Where did they learn *this*, the parents wonder.

And one of the saddest sights is the foreign-born mother or father who finds, often with real consternation, that education in the country of their choice is not regarded as seriously as it was in the country they left behind. I taught many of their sons and daughters and learned of their belief that American schools were academically inferior, and as for the lack of disciplinary supervision, they were goggle-eyed with amazement. Accordingly, some of the children went wild under this free-and-easy tutelage, to the be-

can change in forty-five shared minutes a day what a mother and father have done, by example or lack of it, for years. And again, no teacher should be expected to. This is usurping the rights and duties of the home and would make it easier for parents to shirk their responsibility. Some are too adept at it now. They must realize that the school, even with the best intentions, teachers, and facilities, is powerless unless it works in close conjunction with the home. It stands to reason that if there is nothing to work with in the home, no love, no interest, no awareness of the child as a feeling individual, the school cannot accomplish anything. Parents cannot put children who represent years of dissension, mistrust, and bitterness in the home, into ordinary, overcrowded, understaffed schools, and dump their responsibility there along with the child. They must look to themselves first, for criticism of the schools is justified only when previous responsibilities have been satisfied.

But what of those others, the ones that come from decent homes and are ruined in the school? This is the saddest case, for here are honest, hard-working parents striving to "do" for their children, who return to them after a few months in high-school, crass, flippant, and bored. Their attitude proclaims that they are answerable to no one, not even to their parents. Where did they learn *this*, the parents wonder.

And one of the saddest sights is the foreign-born mother or father who finds, often with real consternation, that education in the country of their choice is not regarded as seriously as it was in the country they left behind. I taught many of their sons and daughters and learned of their belief that American schools were academically inferior, and as for the lack of disciplinary supervision, they were goggle-eyed with amazement. Accordingly, some of the children went wild under this free-and-easy tutelage, to the be-

I have seen the parents of such children cry, have heard bewildered, careworn women mumble, "I just don't understand it." They say it with shame, although it is not directly their fault. I have seen a man who held down two jobs in order to provide a little more for his family confront his son in the school hall, the child nervously brazen in his fantastic clothes and affected haircut. There was a visible struggle going on within each one—the father trying to control humiliation or rage, the son having a hard time deciding whether to be child or stranger. The stranger finally wins, for the child is in school, the setting of his triumph, the place of his liberation. He, fourteen, will not spare his father. His corruption is too absolute; it is necessary for him to maintain and assert his independence in front of his friends and his teachers. That is the only thing that matters now. They walk off to the dean's office, the boy sauntering ahead, the father following disconsolately. It is a thoroughly degrading sight.

The correlation of home and school is the crux of the problem. Generally a good home will produce good children; a bad home, bad children. And today, when many schools are not doing what they should, through choice or necessity, in the proper training of youth, it is essential for a child to have a good home in order to balance the influence of the school. At best, the school can only be an extension of the home, an extension where certain subjects can be taught and certain refinements engendered. Too many parents are anxious to let the schools take over the prerogatives of the home and too many teachers are willing to assume them. It is more than high time for a serious reappraisal by parents and educators alike of just what they wish to accomplish. Lines of jurisdiction should be drawn, aims clarified. Parents should look to their homes, schools

students; administrators who refuse to punish a child for doing wrong; the other students who are living examples that it can be got away with and who urge the newcomers to follow their lead, and, finally, the irrational system of marking and promotion in vogue today that allows a child to be promoted without passing all his subjects. Considering all these factors and how important they all are to a child of high-school age, it is no wonder that even children from good homes succumb.

Nor is the bad child going to be reformed in the public schools. Every once in a while, a parent will come to school and ask the teacher's advice about a child who has become a stranger to him—not for any specific reason but because he fears that all is not well. He gravitates to the school, for he presumes that the child has been in attendance, since he has not been home. But neither, as it turns out, has he been at school. He has attained postgraduate status in his intramural education—he is "playing the hook" with such finesse that neither home nor school has yet awakened to the fact. His father does not know because he leaves the house every morning, presumably headed for school. The school does not know as yet because he shows up for prefect class, where his attendance is taken, and immediately after prefect he forges a pass that has been stolen from the attendance office, and he "takes off." He goes to any one of a number of places—to the movies, the park for a grudge fight, to get his clasp knife sharpened, or just to sit all day on the side steps of the school, basking in the sun. This system is quite successful, actually, and is in constant use. But do not be too hard on the schools in this matter; there were two attendance officers and one truant officer in the school with thousands of students.

spired, the realization that this mob was actually composed of high-school students. It was a shameful business. Would you care to see your child a part of this screaming mob? Is that how you regard him at home? Is that how you want him regarded in school?

to their teachers; and then maybe youngsters might take a look at themselves. A good long look.

Let me cite one incident in recent memory to show what kind of children our schools are producing these days and how little control anyone—parent, teacher, or policeman—has over them. I am afraid that in this particular instance the school bears the major part of the blame.

During the first week of May, 1950, there was a demonstration of public-high-school students in front of New York's City Hall. The demonstration was said to be in support of a teachers' demand for pay for extracurricular activities. Some students, mainly the athletes, felt badly about the suspension of these activities, but most of them continued in their usual state of complete apathy concerning anything scholastic. But soon there was a great deal of talk about it, and the kids were expressing unusually vehement opinions on the subject. Many of us, questioning this sudden interest, were told that students in the public high schools of the city were going to strike in sympathy with the teachers.

The children in our school spent two days in preparation—screaming, chanting, and hooting outside the school. They could not be got inside. It was impossible to punish them for it since the whole school was involved. On the third day, thousands of high-school students converged on City Hall Square and terrorized the vicinity for hours. They attempted to storm City Hall—to "talk" to the Mayor, they said. They pushed, shoved, fought with one another, and overturned cars. They stopped traffic, and it required mounted policemen to quell the riot. They made such an appalling impression on the public at large that the reason they were there was soon forgotten in the horror they in-

teaching years just elapsed, years that I have spent in the world of journalism. I was not so happy to leave that I forgot entirely the scholastic world that had been my life for so long. When you move away from an uncomfortable situation, you see it in better perspective, and that was true about my leaving the classroom. I am now convinced that my dissatisfaction with public-school teaching had nothing to do with passing annoyances. I did not leave teaching because I was underpaid or overburdened. I did not leave because I could not have my own classroom, or have the blackboards washed every day, or choose my own textbooks. And I certainly did not leave because I disliked children or could not teach them. I quit teaching because I felt that the system under which I was teaching was false-materialist in premise and pragmatic in application.

I have tried to show that the progressive system is an unworkable system, that, contrary to its theory and its propaganda, it does not challenge the bright students, because it throws them back on their own resources too frequently and too completely. There is just so much experience, in each child or each group, to be used as a basis for learning, and, when that is exhausted, the intelligent ones need formal training as much as the average ones. If no formal learning is attempted, if their teacher carries progressivism to its logical conclusion, they are left in a vacuum that can only be filled by self-importance. It is an unworkable system for the dull students because it expects them to correlate ideas, experiences, and allusions, to employ, in effect, the very attributes that distinguish the more intelligent. It is unworkable for the average students for the reason that it is not sincerely concerned with them. It is, in effect, a philosophy of education that is concerned with extremes of intelligence and, as such, is unfair.

6. THE LEAVE-TAKING

SO I LEFT. In the middle of a New York summer, I wrote a letter of resignation to my chairman. I did not have another job at the time and did not know what I would do next. But the action was long overdue. It was no great matter to the school system, for I was easily replaced, and I am quite sure that many of my colleagues believe to this day that I was fired.

I returned to the school in September to pick up my last check, and left the place with mixed feelings. During the years I taught there, I sometimes imagined myself leaving for the last time. It was a game that most of us played. It usually occurred to me on Friday afternoons, standing on line to "clock out." Wouldn't it be grand, I thought, to leave without imprinting that fact on the time clock, to hit the pavement *before* the students. What a lark not to show up at eight fifteen on Monday morning, to have someone announce to my students that "Miss Dunn is cutting her classes today"? It would have been a once-in-a-lifetime thrill. But the anticipation was greater than the realization. My final farewell to the ugly building was also a farewell to friends I had made there—the teachers with whom I shared laughs, troubles, and bad lunches, and the students from whom I learned so much.

However, my convictions about teaching, and what is taught, in the public schools have not weakened in the non-

the hall by saying, "Hi"—you are at last equipped to be all thing to all children—nurse, buddy, confidant, analyst, games mistress, guide, leader, steward, maid, mother, warden, and answer woman.

I have seen men and women undertake this preposterous regimen, and I have seen them change in so doing. They do not take the courses, study the texts, or write the papers because they *want* to do so. It is a joyless advancement. A colleague once questioned me on summer plans.

"I'm going to Europe," said I promptly.

"You're not going to school?" he asked, mournfully.

At first I thought his disbelief was a pretense, but I was wrong. He actually wondered why I preferred Rome to a course in the Vocational and Socio-Economic Aspects of Free Lunches in the Public Schools. Many progressive teachers are crashing bores: they take themselves as they have taken their degrees and seminars—too seriously. An essentially unsound system does not become sound for having good spokesmen. Indeed, that is just the danger. The best teachers in the world could never make progressivism anything more than it basically is—a snare and a delusion.

I have pointed out how difficult it is to separate the progressive methods from their philosophy, and how the use of one implies acceptance of the other. Progressives foster their methods because the methods are an extension of their belief that there is no objective truth. They believe and teach that every situation is different, and that the norms that are used to judge or interpret one situation cannot possibly be used for another. Their belief in subjectivity explains the unending discussions, forums, committees, and talks that are necessary features of progressive teaching. The teacher is not supposed to make the barest pronouncement, state the boldest fact, or draw the most obvious con-

The current of progressivism has diluted and shallowed the main stream of educational theory, has made it a torrent to rage and foam and frequently spill over. Most of us, parents, teachers, and school children, have been inundated, swept along in the flood. Would better teachers make a better system? The fault, say the advocates, is not with the system but rather with those who use its methodology unskillfully, those who are uncertain of themselves and their classes. They say that when teachers are sufficiently interested and fully trained and when these dynamic mentors are assigned to brand-new schools loaded with tons of up-to-date equipment, then we will have matchless teaching. The academic paragon who will be in charge of youth when the great day of total schooling arrives will be brilliant, vital, good-looking, talented, calm, successful, humorous, future-facing, and interested in and able to talk about history, geography, literature, mathematics, natural science, nuclear physics, arts and crafts, government, politics, anatomy, ethnology, etymology, weather forecasting, farming, and bird-watching. An ability to converse in Spanish, German, and French is useful; it also helps to know the plots of all current movies and the favorite gags of all television funny-men. However, the truly distinguished teacher is known for his ability to quote batting averages and his skill in recounting the biographies of baseball stars and criminals; he is equipped to base his lessons on the interests and abilities of his pupils. Once the college student has grounded himself in these courses of study, he is free to go on to the *really* important preparation—take off your hats, please, gentlemen—human relations. Human relations are learned from one's students: you learn how to get along with them. Once you have passed that test—and you know you have passed when students greet you in

minds are atrophied. They think that anyone who stands in front of them is supposed to entertain them. When the overgrown boy in the last row raises his arms over his head and sprawls into a leonine yawn, he is informing you that he does not think much of your teaching skill. When he whines, "This here is a boring class," he expects you to break into a song and dance, for most students today do not want to be taught—they want to be amused. And you would be amazed at the number of teachers who run their classes like music halls. To do otherwise, to maintain teaching standards in the face of such constant opposition, is sometimes beyond human capacity. It therefore becomes a backbreaking job to maintain order in a classroom and teach the ones who are willing to be taught while your attention is constantly distracted from the matter at hand by the sheer insolent persistence of those to whom school is a variety show.

How do we know that youth is not benefiting from all this misplaced attention? Read the papers. The frequency with which young people make the front page is an indication. Although many are technically juveniles, the damage they do is frequently on an adult scale. Their errors are not pranks, jokes, or, as they are too often described, the results of an excess of high spirits. They are calculated thrusts at authority—costly vandalism, the flouting of law and order, and a bored attitude in the face of threatened punishment. Children do these things because they know that the punishment will rarely materialize. They have learned to "wait out" the period of possible censure and then return, more confidently than before, to their wayward habits. Verbal censure means nothing to them; they simply assume blank faces and gaze patiently at an invisible point just beyond the speaker's head. The only sign of life

clusion. Everything must be deduced by the students; such dubious mental processes represent a tremendous amount of wasted time. The reason they want the teacher to take a back seat is that they do not believe that total authority should be vested in any one person; or, it would seem, not vested in the person equipped and willing to assume such responsibility. It no longer matters what you teach, but how you teach it. Such pedagogical skylarking is to no purpose; at best, it affords glimpses of a dramatic teacher or an unusually animated class. That only proves that there are teachers who prefer histrionics to history and students who would rather form a committee than form a balanced opinion. The visionaries who advocate a student-interest-based curriculum are really most doctrinaire. They never take a backward look. History begins each morning, mathematics are "meaningful," foreign languages are learned through some mysterious cultural osmosis, and English becomes a matter of making yourself understood in any assortment of grunts and noises that will suit your purpose. Science remains the sacred cow.

And how can you, as a teacher, plan lessons for children whose fascinations are sex, noise, and violence? These are the only things with which they can be impressed. Consider the influences at play on adolescents—television, comic books, motion pictures, tabloids. Through these mediums the young consciousness is battered with stories and life-size pictures of murder, rape, suicide, assault, kidnaping, perversion, and any other form of degeneracy that can be pictured or put into print. Young men and women today are so used to being entertained, so used to having pictures being flashed before their eyes, that when they are asked to read, think, and conclude, when they are expected to form their own mental images, they cannot do so. Their

mation in the corner of the mouth, where the inevitable mess of gum is being audibly snapped. When addressed, their eyes stare uncomprehendingly at the speaker or else flick over your person, indicating irrelevant and unprintable thoughts. I call them "girls" for want of a better word; actually they are neither girls nor women, having too much knowledge for one status and not enough experience for the other. They are creatures of forced growth, pitiful and frightening, living to the fullest their brief moment before turning into cynical old-young women. It is very rare to reach any one of them, to see any expression—delight, humor, curiosity—cross their faces. They exist in a small, misshapen world and are inevitably far more difficult to handle than the most badly behaved boy.

Their clothing tells us who their friends are, whom they are "hanging out with," for such boys and girls dress alike, travel in exclusive gangs with few members and strict initiation rites. These are the roving gangs that figure so prominently in the papers—assaulting, mugging, wrecking, stealing, and murdering. They constitute a definite police problem, since they by no means confine their terror to the juvenile world. Their position within a school is even stronger, for there they can exert the same amount of pressure upon a much smaller area.

Just as their dress hints at their character, their attitude completes the identification. One question is sufficient.

"Excuse me. Where do you belong this period?"

"Don' botha me, ha?"

Nor are you dismissed only as authority. Your intelligence, motives, sanity, and even reading skill are always subject to question. I was canvassing a class one day, asking each student what he intended to read for the next book report, due in two weeks.

on such a face is a faint sneer when you are no longer able to control your anger and you show it. The one you address only shifts from one foot to another, hooks his thumbs into his pocket, and grinds his everlasting gum.

There are definite signs that tell parents and teachers when youth is about to set foot on the primrose path. The signs take two forms—attitude and dress. They say that clothes make the man. Here are some of the getups seen in high schools today: T shirt and dungarees, custom-made "pistol pants," violently pegged and saddle-stitched along the seams, worn with pastel belted "wrap-arounds," and heavily studded leather jackets that fasten in a maze of oblique zippers. Boys addicted to this style wear their jackets hanging open so that the metalwork clanks on the desks as they shuffle up and down the aisles. It is practically impossible to get them to remove these fancy articles of apparel even though there is a school rule that outdoor clothing is to be removed in the classrooms—they are that proud of their looks.

The feminine platoon in the style parade is even more startling. When a girl decides to put her childish days behind her, she first grows her hair and then proceeds to dress it extravagantly in frizzy little curls that cascade into her eyes and fall down her back. She applies heavy make-up, accenting her eyes and her mouth, which is exaggerated beyond its natural outline. She affects long, tight skirts, deeply slit up the sides, and flat-heeled black shoes that lace up the calf. This peek-a-boo footgear protects sheer black stockings, elaborately woven at the heel and frequently emblazoned with rhinestones. The girls complete their costume with long dangling earrings and a sullen expression that extinguishes light from the eyes, banishes gentleness from the brow, and concentrates all facial ani-

character formation and not toss their responsibilities out of the window as soon as their child is put in school. But I also say that the school could do a lot more than it is currently doing to set children on the right path. But this can only be done if we abandon the bad features of the progressive system immediately and begin to instill a basic moral sense. We cannot have both; the progressive system and fixed moral values are mutually exclusive.

This system, in vogue today with countless teachers and many boards of education, is amoral. It is amoral precisely because it recognizes no objective truth. It teaches that there can be no valid judgment of good and bad because no two situations are ever the same. This system, by aim and interpretation, by basic philosophy and methodology, substantiates the pragmatic belief that acts or ideas are neither good nor bad in themselves, but good or bad only in terms of their immediate circumstances. Scholastically, by the same token, Macbeth's talk of conscience—"mine eternal jewel given to the common enemy of man"—is valid only for Macbeth; it would be wrong, progressively speaking, for the teacher to talk conscience to the class and use the play as an object lesson in the evil of doing murder for gain. That is why the classic must be brought up to date, made "meaningful." The teacher must act as if Macbeth's concern over his soul were a purely subjective experience and had no value or root in objective truth—that his soliloquies were the ravings of an inhibited, wife-dominated weakling, and his ideas about punishment for crime not to be taken seriously by contemporary youth, luxuriating in the era of the suspended sentence.

If, therefore, conditions in the public schools today are bad enough, and if those same bad conditions are sufficiently widespread to warrant serious consideration, the question

"What are you reading, Ackerman?"

"*War and Peace*."

"Take the toothpick out of your mouth."

"*WAR AND PEACE*."

"Don't be silly. You couldn't read *War and Peace* in two weeks. I couldn't read *War and Peace* in two weeks."

"So?"

So, when a parent or teacher notices a boy wearing his undershirt to school and his hair long and greasy, when he carries comic books instead of texts, or when a girl is always seen shuffling along with a cigarette between her nicotine-stained fingers, sporting a tight white sweater, he can be sure that immediate, drastic action is called for. It then becomes the parents' pressing duty to find out where such a child is every minute of the day, who his friends are, where they congregate, what they are up to. It is the teacher's duty to clamp down on the budding delinquent, check up on his attendance, discourage dubious friendships. It is essential that parents and teachers never capitulate to youth in this willful condition. They are then interested solely in force, so the force for good must be stronger than the force for evil. It must be fair, honest, and open as well as strong, or else such youngsters, always ready to despise authority, will add to their ready animosity the conviction that they have been wronged. Such a conviction breeds the law-breakers whose grudges are worked off in crime.

But wouldn't it be better if the school did not have to guard against budding delinquency? Wouldn't it be refreshing if the school could proceed once more to its primary function of teaching instead of becoming more and more a remedial institution for character, when it is beyond the scope of the average school to do this? I say it is the parents who must do the tremendously important spadework in

bother to find out how their preachings are practiced. It can be done by parents who concern themselves more seriously with what their children are learning in school. It can be done by boards of education who are a little more choosy about those whom they license to teach, who are more interested in the man than the number of credits he has amassed and how amenable he is to current pedagogical fads. It can be done by teachers who refuse to teach in accordance with false standards.

I consider the failure to develop a moral sense to be the main reason for the distressing conditions in the public schools today. It is further seen in the current de-emphasis on the humanities, which have always been the media for teaching values and ideals as well as subject matter. The small liberal-arts colleges are competing for students with mammoth scientific institutions, and the results are discouraging. In the public high schools, science is highly touted as the only field for superior minds.

It is essential that morality be restored to a place of honor in our educational philosophy, for the problems that the teachers and the school face in undertaking any plan to improve the condition of the students are moral problems. As such, they cannot be solved in any way but a moral way. You cannot turn a child from the ways of crime by telling him that it is uncivic to rob a store, beat up a subway guard, or murder the member of a rival gang in a street war. Civic pride does not provide a sanction adequate to the aim. He must be made to see that such actions are morally wrong, regardless of circumstances. The seriousness of the situation is emphasized when we read of the reasons for young people's committing these crimes: they do not steal because they are hungry but because they are bored; they do not assault a passer-by because he has threatened them but be-

may justifiably be asked of someone who is familiar with the problem and who is acutely interested in its solution: what can be done?

And, like similar questions asked on a large scale, this one too must have a larger answer, one that is not to be found in any one or any number of isolated reforms. It cannot be done by organizing committees, writing reports, or studying vitamin-deficiency charts. It cannot be done by asking college professors to do "studies." It cannot be done by building one great new model school, staffing it with brilliant teachers, landscaping the back yard, and telling visitors that this is the school system. And it certainly cannot be done by coaxing children to learn, by deceiving them with the promise that school is not a place in which to learn, but a place in which to play. These ideas, these tricks, may succeed in particular cases, but experience has shown us that they will not suffice for the betterment of all, for the greater good of the greatest number of children. The school system is a man sick in his guts; he cannot be cured by a Band-Aid on his finger.

What, then, can be done? Like a sick man, the system must be cured by swift diagnosis and proper treatment, no matter how radical. The root cause must be cut out to restore it to health. I think that the root cause is the dominant philosophy of education. In order to help the whole school system, in order to restore it to its proper place as a thing of dignity and worth, I believe that the obviously unworkable features of the progressive philosophy of education must be immediately removed.

And how can it be done? It can be done by educators who know it to be wrong but who now lack the courage to say so, by school boards whose prime concern is the welfare of their children, by educational theorists who

themselves. Concurrently, the responsibility for good example, in deed as well as word, falls with great weight on those actively concerned with young people. This includes not only their parents and teachers but also those involved in providing entertainment for them—the cinema and television producers and the purveyors of adolescent reading. These are all strong factors shaping the character of youth, and it is time that we saw to it that the degree of responsibility matched the degree of influence. We must concentrate on desirable ends in order to achieve them. If we want a sane, law-abiding citizenry, we must teach students on all educational levels, from elementary school to college, the moral principles necessary for such a result. The current educational philosophy takes no account of nonmaterial values, and, to my mind, this is an omission for which we pay dearly. The school should not and cannot assume the rights and responsibilities of the home. But surely the school is a necessary adjunct to the home. If the child learns no moral sense at home, then the function of the school in its development is automatically increased. The child does not learn well from the entertainment to which he devotes such an exorbitant amount of time and interest. How frequently will he find real morality in them—and not the nonsensical “happy ending” attached to a show or comic book that is replete with horror and sadism? The child learns from these sources. He learns that officials are corrupt, that authority is cruelly unjust, that it is fashionable to be a thug. Crime may not pay in the last reel, but it certainly was profitable during all the preceding years. It is obviously part of the teacher’s job to correct these attitudes, and this he can do only by developing a moral sense in his students, the sense that is the rich soil from which virtue may grow.

cause they just don't like his looks; they do not murder in self-defense but in rage because someone will not do as he was told to do—the intended victim would not hand over his money, one gang member would not stay out of another gang's territory or stop dating someone's steady girl friend. These are serious problems. They demand solution. It is my belief that they can only be remedied, or, better still, stopped before they start, by teaching children in the home and in the school, early, long, and often, the moral reasons for being and doing good and the moral reasons for avoiding evil. There was a thirteen-year-old girl in one of my prefect classes who twice ran away from home. She stole money to leave, and when found by the authorities, was discovered to have syphilis. Treating this tragedy as a problem in hygiene could not possibly effect a permanent reformation.

Children need a moral education as well as a social or factual one; they need it for their own personal development and well-being, so that they are not dissolute at the age of thirteen. They need it so that home, school, friends, and pleasure fall into proper perspective, with these things being enjoyed and appreciated in the right way and at the right times. They need it so that they may respect proper authority and the rights and property of others. They need it so that others will enjoy and not detest their company. They need it to realize that they are not the most important group of people in the world, or the funniest or the cleverest. While a moral education, given by home, church, and school, is no guarantee that the recipient will always do right, it is a great help. At least it is a basis, a force to make children realize that although America worships youth, the young must learn to live the good life. They can only learn it from those older and wiser than

It is inconceivable to me that you can teach a child to be a good citizen, to be responsible in his actions toward his fellows and his country, if he first does not recognize his responsibility to God. I believe that the state derives its just rights and prerogatives from God, and that the child who may someday have to defend the Constitution with his life should not be denied the opportunity to know the source of its inspiration. It can be taught in school. How can brotherhood be taught without acknowledging the fatherhood of God? How can crime be proved not to pay except by teaching the validity of conscience and objective truth? If our schools could do this for their students, arm them with the means and reasons for leading a decent life, they would be giving them a sound basis for future living and cultivating good citizenship.

The teacher is overwhelmed by force of numbers; his scanty free time is pre-empted by an appalling amount of paper work. He may have to teach in an antiquated building with insufficient seats for the children. His school might be on a two-shift system because all the children supposed to be there at one time simply cannot fit, physically, in the classrooms. He may be exhausted from going to school at night for an advanced degree, or he may be holding down two jobs at once because his teacher's salary is not adequate. But true teaching is not a matter of buildings or facilities. These are desirable but secondary aids. True teaching requires an awareness of basic premises of behavior and growth, and the intention of setting upon the pliant mind of youth the stamp of morality, reason, and knowledge. The teacher must see this happen in order that his faith in youth and in himself may be justified. Our country must see it happen to justify its faith in the future.

It is inconceivable to me that you can teach a child to be a good citizen, to be responsible in his actions toward his fellows and his country, if he first does not recognize his responsibility to God. I believe that the state derives its just rights and prerogatives from God, and that the child who may someday have to defend the Constitution with his life should not be denied the opportunity to know the source of its inspiration. It can be taught in school. How can brotherhood be taught without acknowledging the fatherhood of God? How can crime be proved not to pay except by teaching the validity of conscience and objective truth? If our schools could do this for their students, arm them with the means and reasons for leading a decent life, they would be giving them a sound basis for future living and cultivating good citizenship.

The teacher is overwhelmed by force of numbers; his scanty free time is pre-empted by an appalling amount of paper work. He may have to teach in an antiquated building with insufficient seats for the children. His school might be on a two-shift system because all the children supposed to be there at one time simply cannot fit, physically, in the classrooms. He may be exhausted from going to school at night for an advanced degree, or he may be holding down two jobs at once because his teacher's salary is not adequate. But true teaching is not a matter of buildings or facilities. These are desirable but secondary aids. True teaching requires an awareness of basic premises of behavior and growth, and the intention of setting upon the pliant mind of youth the stamp of morality, reason, and knowledge. The teacher must see this happen in order that his faith in youth and in himself may be justified. Our country must see it happen to justify its faith in the future.